EQUIP THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY:

BUILDING GOSPEL-CENTERED SPIRITUAL LEADERS WHO MAKE DISCIPLES

A THESIS-PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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JANUARY 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my wife Amy and my daughters (Lauren, Jessica, and Sophie) for your faithful prayers and regular encouragement as I have pursued this degree. You kept me going. And you flexed in so many ways to make this possible. I love you all!

Thank you to my parents, Paul and Sandy Stewman. You not only prayed for me and checked on me along the way, you gave me a warm place to come home to during my Charlotte residencies. What a wonderful experience being with you during those weeks. You have made this degree possible through your prayers and provision.

Thank you to the pastors, staff, and elders of Providence Church. You have been so patient as I have pursued this degree and worked on this project. You have allowed me time and space to work, you have asked me how things are going, and you have prayed for me when I felt stuck or discouraged.

Thank you to the 2017, 2018, and 2019 Equip participants. You all were a joy to spend early Wednesday mornings with as we sought the Lord together! Your commitment to grow as disciples of Jesus and as spiritual leaders inspires me. Without your eager involvement, this project would not have been possible.

Thank you to Dr. Phil Thorne, my supervisor and mentor throughout this entire process. Your ideas have brought me clarity and direction. Your patient encouragement has helped me press on. Your insights have sharpened me. Your flexibility has helped me think outside the box and believe I could finish. You are a great mentor!

Thank you to Dr. David Currie for serving as my reader. But more importantly, thank you for leading this incredible Doctor of Ministry program! I have grown as a

pastor and as a person because of it. Dare I say I have become a passionate, reflective practitioner?

Thank you to my companions in my Doctor of Ministry cohorts. You are maybe the biggest reason I did this program. The opportunity to learn alongside such a diversity of brothers and sisters was invaluable: Different denominations and traditions, different ethnicities and cultures, different ages, different roles, different geographies, and different contexts. What a rich taste of what it means to be a part of the body of Christ! I will always cherish my time learning with you and from you.

ABSTRACT

A church that wants to bear fruit and multiply must be active in equipping spiritual leaders for the work of ministry. At the very least, that means equipping leaders who personally walk with God and make disciples of Jesus. This thesis-project assesses and evaluates the effectiveness of a one-year program designed to equip leaders in the basic core competencies of gospel-centered spiritual leadership. This project also surveys what the Bible says about equipping, gives a theological perspective on gospel-centered spiritual leadership, and reviews relevant literature that shaped the equipping program being evaluated.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

The work of a pastor is sometimes difficult to define, at least in terms of scope and priority. What exactly is a pastor called to do? The typical list of pastoral responsibilities includes preaching, praying, counseling, evangelizing, baptizing, shepherding, leading, planning, administrating, visiting, and teaching. Add special occasions like officiating weddings and funerals to that list, and the job description begins to feel overwhelming. Eugene Peterson says, "The definition that pastors start out with, given to us in our ordination, is that pastoral work is a ministry of word and sacrament."[1] That definition is refreshingly simple. Minister word and sacrament to your congregation, and you have done the work of a pastor. However, the tension not obvious on the surface of that definition is that the ministry of the word can be quite broad, encompassing far more areas of life than the gathered worship of the church on Sundays. If a pastor is to be a minister of the word, then that raises the issue of when, where, and how that ministry is to be lived out. The possibilities and opportunities can feel endless. Which brings the pastor back to the question: What am I called to do? And, how do I prioritize my time?

Shortly before his ascension, the resurrected Jesus gave his famous Great Commission to his disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing

[1] Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1987), 22.

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."[2] Then he promised to be with his disciples in this commission until the end of the age, which means the commission is still in effect for the church today. The primary verb in the Great Commission is to "make disciples," and that verb is modified by three participles (going, baptizing, and teaching). This simply means that the church is called to multiply followers of Jesus by going to people with the gospel, baptizing people into the church as they believe the gospel, and teaching people to live by faith in Jesus and his gospel. In their book *The Trellis and the Vine*, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne write this about Matthew 28: "It's a commission that makes disciple-making the normal agenda and priority of every church and every Christian disciple."[3]

If disciple-making is indeed the priority of the church and every Christian, then it should certainly be the priority of the pastors of the church. Therefore, the work of a pastor includes making disciples of Jesus. But it also necessarily includes equipping others in the church to make disciples, because the weight of the Great Commission does not fall solely on pastors. It is to be shared by all Christians. Unless other Christians are equipped to make disciples, the privilege of participating in the Great Commission will be limited to those in vocational ministry and the mission of the church will be stunted. Herein lies another tension for a pastor: To all his other responsibilities, he must add the responsibility of being a trainer or equipper. Equipping just feels like one more thing to

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[2] Matthew 28:19-20. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture citations are taken from the English Standard Version, 2011.

[3] Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, N.S.W.: Matthias Media, 2009), 13.

do in an already long list of things to do! Which is true, unless the primary calling of a pastor is to make disciples. Then equipping is not just another thing to do. It is integral to the pastoral vocation. But with so many things vying for his attention, it is easy for the pastor to drift from the work of making disciples who can make disciples.

The Setting

We planted Providence Church in Austin, Texas in November of 2010. There were 62 adults and 28 children on the core team. Something that was unusual about our planting team is that we started with three pastoral staff members, because we valued a team model of ministry from the very beginning. Today there are 428 members (265 adults and 163 children)[4] and approximately 150 non-members regularly involved in the life of Providence Church. In addition to the original three pastors, we now have another full-time minister and three part-time staff members. Our vision from the very beginning was to plant a church deeply rooted in the gospel of Jesus, emerging from the soil of the culture, and bearing fruit for the glory of God and the good of the city. Planting a church necessitates paying careful attention to context, which in our case was the city of Austin. Church planters must ask questions like: What are the current realities and defining characteristics of the city? What is the nature of the "soil" of the surrounding culture?

Austin is one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States, which is regularly confirmed by how much everyone in the city complains about traffic. According to the Texas State Demographer, Travis County (where Austin is located) is projected to grow from a population of 1,223,816 in 2018 to a population of 1,474,139 by 2028. That means

[4] Providence Church membership numbers taken from our August 2018 membership roster.

Travis County will grow by 2086 people per month or 67 people per day over the next ten years![5] Why are so many people coming to Austin? One answer is that Austin offers the opportunities of a big city, but the laidback lifestyle of a smaller city. Austin is home to the seventh largest university in the nation, is the seat of the state government, and has a thriving business community. In 2016, Austin was ranked as the nation's best city for young entrepreneurs, based on its networking opportunities, its availability of small business loans, its relatively low cost of living, and its number one ranking in percentage of population in the 25-34 age bracket (17.5%).[6] Business, education, music, film, and technology have all contributed to the thriving of this city, especially among young people.

The Problem

This is the exciting city where we planted Providence Church. But we did not simply want to plant one church. We wanted to plant a church that would plant churches that would plant churches. The population growth in Austin is far outpacing the growth in the number of new churches, and our belief is that planting new churches is the best way to reach new people for Christ and fulfill the Great Commission in our city and beyond. Tim Keller summarizes this belief: "The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for (1) the numerical growth of the body of Christ in a city and (2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing

[5] "Populations Projection Tool," Texas Demographic Center, accessed August 7, 2018, http://osd.texas.gov/Data/TPEPP/Projections/.
[6] Jonathan Todd, "Best Cities for Young Entrepreneurs," NerdWallet, January 4, 2016, accessed August, 7, 2018, https://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/finance/best-cities-for-young-entrepreneurs-2015/.

churches in a city."[7] The commitment of Providence Church to planting more churches has taken several forms: We set aside 10% of all internal giving to go toward church planting. We have financially supported several church plants, both here in Austin and in other locations. In January 2017, we commissioned and sent out a trained church planter and a core team of 60 people to plant Trinity Church in South Austin. And we are currently looking for our next church planter.

Because of our desire for Providence to be a church that plants churches, we have asked God from the very beginning to multiply us at every level of our church. In other words, our intention has always been to make multiplication an integral part of who we are. We want to multiply individual disciples, multiply our small groups (which we call Gospel Communities)[8], and multiply churches. Our hope is that members of Providence will see it as the norm for Christians to bear spiritual fruit and multiply Christ-followers, both at an individual level and corporately as a church. But we do not simply want to multiply numbers. We want to multiply a healthy DNA that is rooted in being disciples of Jesus and making disciples of Jesus. In order to do this, we need to equip an increasing number of leaders who can lead others in these things, whether they be future Gospel Community leaders or simply spiritual leaders who serve in other capacities within the church.

However, we face a number of challenges in equipping new leaders. First, our city is very mobile, so we see a high degree of turnover in our church. Even though

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[7] Timothy Keller, "Why Plant Churches?" Redeemer City to City, 2009, accessed August 13, 2018, http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Why_Plant_Churches-Keller.pdf.

[8] Gospel Communities will be abbreviated as "GCs" throughout this thesis-project. Providence Church is structured around GCs. Being a part of a GC is the best way to get involved in the life of our church, it is the first step in becoming a member of our church, and it is crucial to living out the values of our church.

Providence has experienced steady numerical growth each year since planting in 2010, we have also lost 254 adult members during that same time. Most of those people have left our church due to moving away from Austin. We have found that, even though many people are moving to Austin, they are often on their way to somewhere else long-term. Accepting job promotions in Houston or Dallas, taking next steps in higher education, and moving closer to family have been some of the many reasons that people have left Austin. Quite a few of our best leaders have moved away over the years, and they are not immediately replaceable unless someone is already equipped to fill their role. Our pastoral staff realized that we needed to develop a form of pre-equipping to prepare emerging new leaders with some baseline competencies necessary for spiritual leadership. This would help make them ready to step into leadership when called upon but would also expand our base of leaders to keep up with the needs of a growing and ever-changing congregation.

A second challenge in equipping new leaders is that our church is very young. This makes sense given the high percentage of Austin's population in the 25-34 age bracket and the fact that we are a downtown church that meets at 4:00 PM on Sundays. Taking into account only the members of our church, approximately 19% are in their twenties, 58% are in their thirties, 19% are in their forties, with the remaining 4% in their fifties through seventies; that is 77% of our members are in their twenties and thirties![9] When you factor in regular attenders involved in the life of our church, the average age skews even younger. Many of these young people are gifted to lead others but have received very little basic equipping in how to walk with God and how to make disciples.

[9] Providence Church membership statistics taken from our August 2018 membership roster.

A final challenge that we face in equipping new leaders is that our church has a clearly defined mission, which necessarily narrows and shapes our definition of an equipped leader in that mission. The mission of Providence Church is to help people believe and apply the gospel in every area of life. In order for this to happen, our leaders need a firsthand experience of growing in the gospel through personally walking with Jesus, because leaders cannot pass along to others what they have not experienced themselves. They also need some basic understanding of what spiritual formation looks like in their own life and the lives of others. Thirdly, leaders need to develop fluency in how to talk about the gospel and apply it to all of life. And finally, they need a growing conviction that moving toward others with the gospel and making disciples is a priority in life. Any leadership equipping program that we do as a church must flow out of and facilitate our mission to help people believe and apply the gospel in every area of life.

Research Question

The research question for this thesis-project arises from these specific challenges faced by Providence Church as we seek to equip leaders who believe and apply the gospel to every area of life and enable others to do the same. My research question is: How do we equip young leaders in a highly mobile context with the basic core competencies necessary for gospel-centered leadership?

Thesis

My thesis is the following: We can effectively equip young leaders with the basic core competencies necessary for gospel-centered leadership through a one-year mentored

cohort designed around four training emphases, with a focus on reading, interaction, practical projects, and relationships.

When the pastoral staff of Providence Church determined in 2016 that we needed to develop a plan to more intentionally equip emerging young leaders, we first clarified our purpose in designing such an equipping program. Then we listed our success criteria by which to measure it. Our overall purpose was to equip an invited group of emerging leaders to grow in becoming multiplying disciples and effective spiritual leaders. We had several criteria to measure the success of the equipping program: (1) These leaders would become "self-feeders" who personally walk with God through engaging the spiritual disciplines; (2) These leaders would develop a broad view of spiritual formation and how our practices shape our loves; (3) These leaders would grow in gospel fluency, being able to apply the gospel to their own lives as well as the lives of others; (4) These leaders would personally understand and experience what it means to participate in the mission of Jesus and live as a multiplying disciple.

I was tasked as the pastor responsible for developing this basic equipping program for Providence. The next step was to decide which format would most effectively equip these young leaders. We wanted a format that would engender commitment to the program, foster relationships and accountability, and help trainees internalize and apply the content. We had offered equipping classes in the past, with varying degrees of success in meeting those criteria. The classroom format offers the advantage of covering more content in the form of teaching or lectures. However, a classroom setting usually does not provide the kind of relationship-building and cross-discipleship for which we were looking. We wanted the equipping to feel more like a small group than a class, where

participants would regularly process with one another how the content applied to their actual lives. It was also important to have enough time for relationships to develop and for the group to form an identity. Our desire was for them to see themselves as a community of young leaders who were called to take responsibility for their own spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of others within the church. The decision was made to have the equipping take place over the course of an entire calendar year. Our rhythm would be to meet for seven to eight consecutive weeks covering one topic. Then we would take several weeks off to provide rest, rejuvenation, and reflection before beginning the next topic.

The year-long program would divide the year into four quarters. The first quarter would focus on personally walking with God through the spiritual disciplines. The second quarter would focus on a broader understanding of spiritual formation by looking at how our habits and practices form our affections. The third quarter would focus on learning to apply the gospel to a specific area of sin or brokenness. Finally, the fourth quarter would focus on missional life and personal disciple-making. The content for each quarter would include reading one book, interacting over the book in small group discussion, doing a practical project that applies the particular training emphasis to the real life of the participants, and receiving feedback and accountability related to the project.

We implemented this program, which we call Equip, in pilot form in 2017 with a cohort of twelve young leaders in our church. My wife and I were the co-leaders of Equip, and the first year was so enjoyable that we led it again in 2018 and 2019 with cohorts of eighteen and fourteen people respectively. The goal of this thesis-project is to

evaluate whether or not this program is actually producing leaders who are more equipped for gospel-centered leadership. My objectives are to evaluate the overall effectiveness of Equip, to ask what we should do differently, and to explore potential next steps of equipping and leadership development for our church. Assessment and evaluation from the 2017, 2018, and 2019 cohorts will be used to test the effectiveness of the program and the accuracy of my thesis.

Overview of This Thesis-Project

My thesis is that we can effectively equip young leaders with basic core competencies for gospel-centered leadership through a one-year mentored cohort, designed around four training emphases, with a focus on reading, interaction, practical projects, and relationships. The remaining chapters of this paper will defend, test, and evaluate that thesis. Chapter two will explore the biblical and theological foundations of equipping leaders for the mission of God. Biblically I will give attention to God's preparation of two leaders in the Old Testament and to Jesus' method of equipping disciples in the New Testament. A primary biblical text to be explored in this thesis-project is Ephesians 4:11-12, in which Paul appears to give pastors the responsibility to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The way one interprets this passage undoubtedly shapes the way one thinks about the vocation of pastors. Theologically, I will define what is meant by "gospel-centered leadership." Why do we attach the term "gospel-centered" to our idea of spiritual leadership at Providence Church? This will be an exploration of what the gospel is and how the gospel is central to all of life, which consequently impacts what it looks like to lead others spiritually.

Chapter three will review some of the literature that has influenced our approach to equipping gospel-centered spiritual leaders at Providence Church. At a minimum, we define a spiritual leader as someone who is personally growing in the gospel, who knows how to apply the gospel to specific areas of sin and brokenness, and who is learning how to make disciples of Jesus. This definition informs our four training emphases for Equip, which are the spiritual disciplines, spiritual formation, gospel fluency, and personal disciple-making. Chapter three will interact with the main texts that we used for these four training emphases as well as other relevant literature related to each section of Equip.

Chapter four will set forth the project design. The first part of the project is to run our one-year Equip program with eighteen participants in 2018 and fourteen participants in 2019. The program runs from January through December, dividing the year into four training emphases. This chapter will explain the details of the program by looking at what we did each quarter, including the reading, the discussions, and the practical projects. This chapter will also examine the second part of the project, which is the evaluation of Equip. In order to help evaluate the effectiveness of Equip in equipping young leaders, the participants will take part in a self-assessment that is filled out at the beginning of the program and at the end. In addition, there will be a self-assessment from the first-year Equip participants (2017). This will evaluate whether or not Equip has made any difference in their life almost a year after going through the program. Are there any long-term changes they have seen in their perspective and practices?

Chapter five will reveal the outcomes of the project. What was learned? How can we improve our current Equip program for greater effectiveness? What do the results say

about the next steps of leadership development for Providence Church? How can this equipping be transferable to other churches, especially as we seek to plant more churches in the years to come?

Conclusion

"The first duty of a church leadership is to see to it that a foundation is laid in the beginning on which can be built an effective and continuing evangelistic ministry to the multitudes…raising up trained disciplers 'for the work of ministering' with the pastor."[10] If Robert Coleman is correct about this, then that means the pastoral staff of churches like Providence Church must give time and attention to equipping the next generation of spiritual leaders. This is the only way churches in growing cities like Austin are ever going to reach the multitudes with the gospel. A multiplying population will be most impacted for Christ by the multiplication of churches, which will require the multiplication of Christ-centered leaders. In other words, the goal of multiplying churches requires making disciples of Jesus who will make disciples of Jesus. But for this to happen, Christians must be equipped with the basics of how to grow in Christ and how to help others grow in Christ. And they must be equipped with a vision for how their life fits into God's great mission of making disciples of Jesus. This equipping of the saints is a vital part of a pastor's calling. It is a privilege for the pastor, but it can feel overwhelming with all the other things a pastor is called to do. My hope is that this thesis-project will offer a simple plan that pastors can use for the introductory equipping

[10] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1993), 30.

of disciple-makers; a plan that is rooted in the scriptures and draws from Christ-exalting literature that intends to see his church flourish.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The equipping ministry of a church cannot merely be a pragmatic strategy that is meant to keep the organization of the church going. Pragmatism does not capture the hearts of people, at least not for very long. If an equipping ministry is to engender the conviction necessary to persevere through the long process of developing spiritual leaders, it must be rooted in the overall plan of God. A strategy that flows from the heart of God and that is revealed in scripture can imbue God's people with a sense of purpose, zeal, and missional clarity. Equipping is not just a practical matter. It is decidedly theological.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the biblical and theological foundations of equipping gospel-centered leaders for the mission of God. In other words, what does God think and say about this issue? First, a biblical perspective will provide a partial survey of what the Bible says about equipping leaders. Why is equipping even necessary at all? What forms has it taken in the history of God's people throughout the scriptures? Second, a theological perspective will seek to answer the question of why Providence Church specifically focuses on equipping gospel-centered leaders. What are the theological underpinnings for the term "gospel-centered?" Why are we explicit about using that term in our definition of an equipped spiritual leader? Rooting this thesis-project in a firm biblical theology will ensure that it does not rest on human strategy, but rather on the revealed will of God.

A Biblical Perspective on Equipping Leaders

To equip someone simply means to prepare them for a particular purpose or task and to provide what they need to carry out that purpose or task.[1] Prepare and provide. The assumption in equipping is that the person being equipped is not adequately prepared for the task at hand but is lacking something necessary. The consistent witness of the Bible is that the servants of God must be prepared to carry out the purposes of God, and they must receive provision from outside themselves in order to do so. They must be equipped for the mission of God. This is seen throughout the scriptures, from Adam to the early church. The following is a brief survey of what the Bible says on this matter.

Adam

In the beginning, God created human beings in his own image, he blessed them, and he gave them a mission: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."[2] Human beings are uniquely made to image God or to display his likeness in the world. We do so, at least in part, by fruitfully filling the earth and by ruling over it, all in the context of a relationship with God. "God could have created everything imaginable and filled the earth himself. But he chose to create humanity to work alongside him to actualize the universe's potential, to participate in

[1] *Cambridge Dictionary*, accessed December 7, 2018, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/equip. More will be said about the meaning of this word in the upcoming discussion of Ephesians 4:11-12.
[2] Genesis 1:28.

God's own work."[3] However when Adam was created, he did not automatically know how to fulfill the mission God had given him, nor did he know how to walk with God in worship and obedience. He had to learn these things. God placed Adam in the garden of Eden[4], and the garden was a learning lab of sorts. There in the garden, God prepared Adam for participation in the mission of God and provided everything necessary for him to carry it out.

First, in the garden Adam was equipped by God to be fruitful, multiply, and have dominion. "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it."[5] The two Hebrew verbs used in this verse ("work" and "keep") seem to have been chosen very intentionally to describe the nature of Adam's assignment. "These two verbs are used throughout the Pentateuch for spiritual service. 'Keep' is used for keeping the commandments and taking heed to obey God's Word; 'serve' (work) describes the worship and service of the Lord."[6] Both of these words are often used to describe priestly activities in the Old Testament.[7] This reality brings a whole new meaning to Adam's work in the garden. His physical work of cultivating the garden was also a spiritual service of worship. God put Adam there to learn how to serve as a type of priest, mediating God's work in the created order by exercising dominion over the earth as a good steward of the earth. The work God provided Adam inside the garden prepared him with the knowledge and ability to bring forth fruit on the earth outside the garden.

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[3] "God Creates and Equips People to Work," *Theology of Work Project*, accessed March 19, 2019, https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/genesis-1-11-and-work/god-creates-and-equips-people-to-work-genesis-126-225.

[4] Genesis 2:8.

[5] Genesis 2:15.

[6] Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 124.

[7] See Numbers 3:7-8 as sample verses where both verbs are used.

But there was another type of fruitfulness for which Adam needed to be equipped: The fruitfulness of having children or multiplying image-bearers of God on the earth. Adam did not have the means in and of himself to multiply in this sense. He needed provision from outside himself in order to do so. God revealed this need to Adam by giving him the task of naming the animals and the birds.[8] The job of naming the animals was an assignment that helped prepare Adam for his calling to have dominion on earth. Adam was being equipped in how to exercise his God-given authority over other living creatures, because "to give a name to something is to assert authority over it."[9] However, in the process, Adam learned something else: There was no other creature who corresponded to him.[10] As Adam began to realize his need, God graciously provided what Adam could not provide for himself. God made Eve while Adam was literally sleeping.[11] Adam was overjoyed to finally have a companion who was like him.[12] Together in a one-flesh relationship, Adam and Eve were able to begin fulfilling God's call to multiply children on the earth. Not only that, Adam had been given a helper to serve alongside him in exercising dominion over the earth.[13] "The word (helper) essentially describes one who provides what is lacking in the man, who can do what the man alone cannot do…human beings cannot fulfill their destiny except in mutual assistance."[14] God had equipped Adam with exactly what he needed to fulfill his destiny.

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[8] Genesis 2:19.
[9] Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, John D.W. Watts, and Ralph P. Martin (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 68.
[10] Genesis 2:20.
[11] Genesis 2:21-22.
[12] Genesis 2:23.
[13] Genesis 2:18.
[14] Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 126.

God also equipped Adam in the garden to walk with him in a relationship of worship and obedience. "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'."[15] Through this simple command, God was telling Adam that obedience to God's word was the way to life and that disobedience to God's word would lead to death. The word of God equipped Adam with everything necessary to enjoy life in fellowship with God. Adam only needed to heed God's word. "The inference of God's commands in Genesis 2:16-17 is that God alone knows what is good for human beings…To enjoy the 'good' we must trust God and obey him."[16]

Sadly, Adam and Eve did not trust God and obey his word. They decided to eat of the forbidden tree. When they did so, their fellowship with God and with one another was broken. This broken fellowship was manifested in their hiding from God[17] and hiding from one another. Sin opened their eyes, but not in a good way. Sin laid them bare and left them feeling exposed. For the first time, Adam and Eve realized they were naked. So, they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.[18] However, God knew that the man and the woman needed something more substantial for covering if they were going to live in a fallen world. They needed something made by his hands, not their own. "And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them."[19] It is apparent from this verse that animals died so that the man and woman could

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[15] Genesis 2:16-17.
[16] John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 101.
[17] Genesis 3:8.
[18] Genesis 3:7.
[19] Genesis 3:21.

be sufficiently clothed. This is the first hint of substitutionary atonement in the Bible. Substitutionary atonement simply means that an innocent one dies so that a guilty one can be covered. This account in Genesis is a beautiful foreshadowing of the gospel, in which God covers our sin by clothing us in the righteousness of the crucified Christ. God clothed Adam and Eve by providing something that they could not provide for themselves. They could not sufficiently cover the effects of their sin on their own, so God clothed them. He equipped them to walk with him in a fallen world.

Moses

Moses is arguably the most important leader in the Old Testament. God called him to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, and this exodus became the defining redemptive story in Israel's history. It is easy to assume that God chose a ready-made leader for such a great task. But the scriptures tell a different story. Moses was not ready on his own. He had to be equipped for the mission of God. First God prepared him to lead Israel out of Egypt and provided everything he needed to do this. Later after the exodus, God equipped Moses with necessary skills to lead Israel in the wilderness.

Moses was a Hebrew, but he was raised in Pharaoh's household and was instructed in the Egyptian way of life.[20] "One day, when Moses had grown up[21], he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand."[22] Moses' passion to rescue Israel from their burdens

[20] Acts 7:21-22.
[21] Acts 7:23 says that Moses was 40 years old when this event happened.
[22] Exodus 2:11-12.

was a good thing, but his method was all wrong. He was impulsive, taking matters into his own hands rather than seeking God. His first instinct was to shed blood and then try to hide his sin. Moses was not ready to lead God's people.

When Moses heard that Pharaoh was seeking his life for killing the Egyptian, he fled to Midian. Moses may have seen Midian as a place of escape, but God intended it to be a place of preparation. Moses would dwell there in Midian for forty years before returning to Egypt to fulfill God's mission for him.[23] Forty years of preparation! Philip Graham Ryken says that God used three things in Midian to prepare Moses for his primary mission of leading God's people out of slavery: His living situation, his family situation, and his work situation.[24] First, his living situation. The Midianites were nomadic people, so for Moses to live among them meant that he was living out in the wilderness.[25] Considering that Moses would one day lead God's people through the wilderness, it was undeniably developmental for him to learn how to survive there. The second thing God used to prepare Moses was his family situation. There amongst the Midianites, Moses got married and then had a son.[26] His everyday life as a husband and father played a part in equipping Moses for leadership. "By settling into the life of the home Moses learned how to be a servant-leader."[27] Third, God used Moses' work situation to prepare him. "Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law."[28] R. Alan Cole notes that the Hebrew for "was keeping" in this verse suggests that

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[23] Acts 7:30.
[24] Philip Graham Ryken, *Preaching the Word Series, Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, series ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 71-73.
[25] Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, 71.
[26] Exodus 2:21-22.
[27] Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, 72.
[28] Exodus 3:1.

shepherding was Moses' habitual occupation.[29] Moses was a shepherd by vocation. He spent his days learning how to care for sheep. He protected them, fed them, and brought back strays. It was a thankless job that grew Moses in humility and patience. What better equipping could there be for the man who would one day lead God's people like a flock?[30]

After forty years of preparing Moses in Midian, God was ready to give him his mission. God spoke to Moses from the burning bush: "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."[31] But God did not merely give Moses an assignment, he provided everything necessary for its completion. He fully equipped Moses for the mission. First, God promised his own presence: "I will be with you."[32] Next, God promised his power: "But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go…So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go."[33] The mission of God is impossible without the presence and power of God, which should be a fundamental recognition in all biblical equipping. God graciously equipped Moses with his presence and power, but Moses was still not sure he was competent to do the thing to which God was calling him. He protested, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent…but I am slow of speech and of tongue."[34] In response to this, God promised to give Moses a mouthpiece. Aaron, who was well-spoken, would speak to the people on behalf of God and Moses. "Aaron shall be your

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[29] R. Alan Cole, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, *vol. 2, Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary,* general ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 68.
[30] Psalm 77:20.
[31] Exodus 3:10.
[32] Exodus 3:12.
[33] Exodus 3:19-20.
[34] Exodus 4:10.

mouth, and you shall be as God to him."[35] God equipped Moses with a partner in the mission, someone who had different gifts than him. God not only prepared Moses personally for the mission of leading Israel out of Egypt, he also provided everything Moses would need to do it.

However, the call for Moses to lead Israel would extend well beyond the exodus from Egypt. Moses would end up leading Israel for another 40 years in the wilderness, which would call for new and different leadership skills. Hence, God's equipping of Moses continued even in the wilderness. One example of this is found in Exodus 18, where Moses is equipped through the counsel of his father-in-law, Jethro. Jethro had come to see Moses in the wilderness and to celebrate God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. While Jethro was there, "Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning until evening."[36] Jethro was taken aback by this: "Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?"[37] Jethro captured Moses' leadership problem with one word: Alone. It was as if Moses was the sun and all the planets were orbiting around him. He was at the center of every problem. All the issues of the community revolved around him, alone.

Jethro stepped in to give Moses some leadership training. Philip Ryken comments, "Jethro proposed a new form of government. It was partly a judicial system, a way of deciding legal cases, with Moses serving as the chief justice. It was also a plan for providing pastoral care for the people of God."[38] Jethro's advice was for Moses to look

[35] Exodus 4:16.
[36] Exodus 18:13.
[37] Exodus 18:14.
[38] Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, 483.

for trustworthy, godly men from among the people to help give leadership to the people. "Every great matter they shall bring to you (Moses), but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you."[39] Under this new leadership structure, the word "alone" is replaced with the word "with." With is better than alone. Moses needed someone outside himself to show him that. He needed to be equipped in a new way of thinking if he was going to last as a leader. The result of Moses following Jethro's counsel would be this: "You will be able to endure, and all this people will go to their place in peace."[40] Endurance for Moses and peace for the people. Good equipping not only helps leaders, it promotes the welfare of the entire community.

Jesus and the Twelve

Jesus knew all along that he would die on the cross, be raised from the dead, and then ascend to the Father. He knew his time on earth would be short. "Little children, yet a little while I am with you."[41] That being said, Jesus intended his disciples to carry on his mission long after he was gone. If they were going to do so, then he had to equip them for it. He needed to prepare them and provide everything they needed. One could argue that all of Jesus' public ministry had an equipping element to it. He was always thinking about multiplying his ministry through his disciples. A disciple is simply a learner or an apprentice. "Disciples in Jesus' day would follow their rabbi wherever he went, learning

[39] Exodus 18:22.
[40] Exodus 18:23.
[41] John 13:33.

from the rabbi's teaching and being trained to do as the rabbi did."[42] Jesus staked the entire future of his mission on his preparation of twelve disciples. "And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons."[43] According to these verses, Jesus' twofold purpose in appointing the twelve was that they might be with him and that he might send them out. Broadly speaking, those are the two means by which Jesus equipped his twelve disciples: Being with them and sending them out. A brief look at each of these gives insight into Jesus' method of equipping.

He Was with Them

There is no more powerful way to learn from someone than to be with them, seeing how they do things, hearing what they value, and learning to imitate their way of life. We become like those we spend time with, and Jesus knew that. So, he insured that his twelve disciples spent much time with him learning from him. In their time with him, Jesus equipped them in two ways: By modeling and by teaching.

First, he modeled the things to which he was calling them. "For I have given you an example."[44] Jesus said those words immediately after he had washed his disciples' feet. He had done the work of a servant, which none of the disciples were inclined to do. By his own actions, Jesus was training them in the ways of kingdom leadership. In the kingdom, the leader is a servant. "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your

[42] Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 16.
[43] Mark 3:14-15.
[44] John 13:15.

feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."[45] In other words, "Follow my example. Real spiritual leadership is not ruling over others, it is serving them."

Jesus also modeled evangelism to his disciples. "Watching him, they learned what it was all about. He led them to recognize the need inherent in all classes of people, and the best methods of approaching them. They observed how he drew people to himself…how he opened to them the way of salvation."[46] Luke 19 records Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector. Surely the disciples witnessed Jesus in this interaction, because they were with him on his way to Jerusalem.[47] The diminutive Zacchaeus had climbed a tree to be able see Jesus as he passed by. Jesus stopped and told Zacchaeus that he wanted to stay at his house that day. When Jesus went to the home of Zacchaeus, the crowd grumbled: "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."[48] The disciples were learning from Jesus just by watching his example. He was teaching them not to avoid anyone, even those the culture considered untouchable or irredeemable, but instead to move towards everyone with the gospel. Zacchaeus repented and believed in Jesus, and Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house…For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."[49] Darrell Bock observes, "Jesus concludes with a statement of mission…[his] mission is to initiate relationships with those who do not know God and call them to come to know him."[50] Jesus had effectively trained his disciples in his (and their) mission of evangelism, just by doing it in front of them.

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[45] John 13:14.
[46] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1993), 66.
[47] Luke 18:31.
[48] Luke 19:7.
[49] Luke 19:9-10.
[50] Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament: Luke, vol. 2.*, ed. Moises Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1523.

Another thing that Jesus modeled when he was with his disciples was prayer. Even though he was God in the flesh, he never lived autonomously. He was always in communication with the Father, expressing dependence, fellowship, and submission. The disciples saw him slip away to pray in private.[51] They saw him pray publicly.[52] They saw him pray in everyday situations like before meals.[53] His modeling of prayer had an effect on the disciples, because it made them want to pray. "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray'."[54]

This verse points to the second way Jesus equipped his disciples when he was with them: He taught them. In Luke 11:2-4, he taught them to pray by giving them a paradigm for prayer. We know it as the Lord's Prayer. It gives broad themes to guide disciples in every generation as they seek God in prayer. Disciples of Jesus can address God as Father, because we are together the family of God.[55] Disciples should pray for God's kingdom to come, because that is our earnest desire for the world.[56] Disciples ought to pray for provision, forgiveness, and protection for the community of God's people.[57] "The first-person plural requests show the prayer's community focus. Jesus wants the disciples to see the prayer as *their* prayer. Religion among disciples is not a personal affair, but one in which they are placed into relationship with one another..."[58]

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[51] Mark 1:35 and Luke 5:16.
[52] John 11:41-42 and John 12:27-30.
[53] Luke 22:17, 19.
[54] Luke 11:1.
[55] Luke 11:2.
[56] Luke 11:2.
[57] Luke 11:3-4. Categories of provision, forgiveness, and protection taken from Bock, *Luke, vol. 2*, 1063.
[58] Bock, *Luke, vol. 2*, 1051.

Jesus was not only teaching his apprentices to pray, he was teaching them about the communal nature of the church and her mission.

Another example of Jesus equipping his disciples through direct teaching is seen in the upper room discourse the night he was arrested. This teaching can be found in chapters 13-16 of John's gospel. Jesus was essentially preparing the disciples for what they needed to know when he was gone. One thing they needed to know about was the coming of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Jesus taught them: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."[59] Jesus also told them in John 16, "And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment…he will guide you into all the truth…he will take what is mine and declare it to you."[60] Frederick Dale Bruner summarizes this teaching of Jesus from John 16 by outlining it this way: First, the Paraclete [Spirit] will show the world wrong (vv. 8-11). Second, the Paraclete will lead the Church aright (vv. 12-15).[61] This eleventh hour teaching on the Holy Spirit was vital equipping for the disciples, showing who would enable their mission to the world and their leadership of the church when Jesus was gone.

He Sent Them Out

Although most of Jesus' equipping of his disciples happened when they were with him, there was a second method he used to equip them: He sent them out.[62] In other

[59] John 14:26.
[60] John 16:8, 13-14.
[61] Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 922.
[62] Mark 3:14.

words, he gave them assignments. These assignments prepared them for their mission by giving them real-life ministry experiences. Luke 9 recounts one of these assignments: "And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal."[63] Essentially Jesus sent them out to imitate what he himself had been doing, healing people and preaching the gospel. As they went out, they would learn much about ministry through both their successes and their failures.

There were clear successes that undoubtedly grew the disciples in their confidence that they could effectively minister the gospel. Luke 9:6 says that, after Jesus sent them out, they "went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere." This word "everywhere" indicates that the disciples faithfully carried out their assignment in every place they went, and they did so successfully. People all over the region heard the gospel and were healed through their ministry. After another similar mission, the disciples returned to Jesus saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"[64] This kind of success bolstered their belief that they could do what Jesus was calling them to, because he had empowered them in his name.

But the disciples also experienced failure when Jesus gave them ministry assignments. They learned from these failures that their total dependence must be on the Lord and not on themselves. Shortly after returning from the mission on which Jesus had sent them in Luke 9:1-6, the twelve apostles withdrew with Jesus to a town called Bethsaida for a time of debriefing.[65] However they were not alone for long, because the

[63] Luke 9:1-2.
[64] Luke 10:17.
[65] Luke 9:10.

crowds soon found them and flocked to Jesus again. Jesus welcomed the crowds and continued to do the very things he had sent the disciples to do: He spoke to the people about the kingdom of God and cured those who needed healing.[66] As the day came to an end, the disciples told Jesus that he should send the crowd away to the surrounding villages so that they could find food and lodging. "But he said to them, 'You give them something to eat'."[67] Needless to say, this assignment taught the disciples about their own limitations. They did not have the resources within themselves to feed five thousand people. Their failure in this assignment was not in their lack of trying. They were trying to solve the problem, offering to go and buy food for the people.[68] Their failure was in their reflex to trust their own resources rather than look to Jesus. Not only did Jesus have the power to provide a meal for such a great crowd, Jesus himself was the Bread of Life[69]; the only one who could satisfy the deepest hungers of the people. The disciples needed to learn that their future ministry would not be about pointing people to their own ingenuity and resources, rather it would be about pointing people to Jesus. Their failure in this assignment helped equip them in that reality and reinforce their trust in Jesus.

One other way Jesus equipped his disciples should be mentioned. He provided the power they needed to fulfill his mission after he had ascended to the Father. They would not be able to carry out the purposes of God without the provision of God. Immediately before his ascension, Jesus told the disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and

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[66] Luke 9:11.
[67] Luke 9:13.
[68] Luke 9:13.
[69] John 6:35.

Samaria, and to the end of the earth."[70] As they were equipped with power from outside themselves, they would be able to fulfill their calling. That power would be none other than the Spirit of Christ himself. "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."[71] Jesus had previously given the disciples a metaphor to describe how he would be in them, enabling them to be fruitful in the world: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."[72] Jesus equipped the disciples for ministry by joining them to himself by his Spirit. In him, they had everything they needed for the mission of God.

Paul in Ephesians 4:11-12

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is about the church. The first three chapters of Ephesians expound on God's glorious, eternal plan to form a people for himself. The details of this plan were hidden in ages past, but the mystery of the church has now been revealed through the coming of Jesus. "This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."[73] What is the mystery that has been revealed? The church: A multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-generational people united as one body through Jesus Christ. This united body of diverse people is like nothing the world has ever known! Therefore, in chapters 4-6 of Ephesians, Paul sets forth what life in the church is to look like practically. How does this body live out its unity? How does it mature and live out its

[70] Acts 1:8.
[71] Matthew 28:20.
[72] John 15:5.
[73] Ephesians 3:6.

mission? Well, Jesus provides everything necessary for his body to grow and become all it is meant to be. Ephesians 4:11-12 says, "**11**And he [Jesus] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **12**to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." In other words, Jesus gives various types of leaders to the church so that he might accomplish two purposes. John Stott explains: "His immediate purpose was 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry' or better 'to equip God's people for work in his service,' and his ultimate purpose 'for building up the body of Christ'."[74] If this translation (ESV) of Ephesians 4:11-12 is correct, then pastors are called to minister the scriptures in such a way that God's people are equipped for the work of ministry. Then, as the saints do the work of ministry, the entire body is edified.

However, there is debate over the correct translation of verse 12. This verse is made up of three prepositional phrases which all relate to why the various leaders in verse 11 are given to the church. The three prepositional phrases are: (1) To equip the saints (2) for the work of ministry (3) for building up the body of Christ. There are no commas in the original Greek text, so translators must make an interpretive decision. Do all three phrases describe distinct tasks given to the leaders of verse 11? If so, there should be a comma after each phrase in verse 12. As an example of this interpretation, the King James Version of Ephesians 4:11-12 reads, "**11**And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; **12**for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." According to this translation, Christ gave leaders to the church so that they might

[74] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979), 166.

accomplish three distinct purposes: Perfecting or equipping the saints, doing the work of ministry, and edifying the body.

There is another more common interpretation of verse 12, which we have already considered. It holds that the second prepositional phrase "for the work of ministry" is dependent on the first phrase "to equip the saints" rather than coordinate with it. Meaning, the phrase "for the work of ministry" is not a separate task given to church leaders, but rather it builds out the reason why the church leaders "equip the saints." In other words, the leaders of the church equip the members of the church for doing the work of ministry. This is how the ESV and most modern translations of the Bible render verse 12. In his commentary on Ephesians, Frank Thielman illuminates what is at stake in the debate over the correct interpretation of verse 12:

> The temperature of the debate begins to rise when interpreters suspect that the exegesis of the text has been driven more by concerns about the structure of the modern church than by dispassionate scholarship. According to this text, who does the work of ministry in today's church: the officers of the church or the people whom the officers equip?[75]

The way one translates verse 12 does indeed impact the way one understands how the church is to be structured. Conversely, one's view of the structure of the church might influence the way one translates verse 12.

T. David Gordon, former professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, is representative of those who argue for the first interpretation of verse 12 (found in the King James Version). In a 1994 article in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Gordon challenges the second interpretation of this verse (found in the ESV) because he says it teaches that lay members, not pastors, are to

[75] Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 277.

do most of the ministry of the church. Gordon summarizes why he believes this translation is wrong: "The error consists in reducing the function of the ordained ministry to 'equipping' saints for service."[76] Gordon believes those who promote what he calls "the equipping viewpoint" have not done proper exegetical work in Ephesians 4:11-12, but instead have used modern translations of those verses as a prooftext for what they already presuppose about the structure of the church. Then he sets out to disprove the equipping viewpoint by making three exegetical arguments about verse 12.

First, Gordon argues that the three purpose clauses in verse 12 are parallel and thus all have the same subject, which is the gifted ones or ministers listed in verse 11. He says, "Apart from some fairly clear indication there would be no reason to expect that one of the telic clauses is subordinated to one of the others…thus the most natural reading of v. 12 is that of the KJV, which construes the three telic clauses as indicating what the 'gifted ones' do for and in the body."[77] Second, Gordon argues that the Greek verb "katartismon," which is translated as "equip" in the ESV, is better translated as "perfect/constitute." This word has a variety of meanings when used in the New Testament, so Gordon maintains that the context of its usage should determine the appropriate translation. In light of the context and overall message of Ephesians 4, Gordon contends, "It is preferable to understand the expression (katartismon) to mean either 'perfecting' or 'constituting/joining' because the language and thought of the body, unified and growing to perfection, will continue throughout the chapter."[78] Thirdly,

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[76] T. David Gordon, "Equipping Ministry in Ephesians 4?", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 1 (March 1994): 69, accessed September 24, 2019, https:www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/37/37-1/JETS_37-1_069-078_Gordon.pdf.

[77] Gordon, "Equipping Ministry in Ephesians 4?", 71 and 72.

[78] Gordon, "Equipping Ministry in Ephesians 4?", 73.

Gordon argues that it must be determined what is meant by the Greek phrase "ergon diakonias," which is translated as "work of ministry" in the ESV. Does it mean the ministry of the Word or does it just mean general acts of Christian service? If it means the ministry of the Word, Gordon maintains that this is the responsibility of the ministers listed in verse 11. He says this is consistent with how the rest of the New Testament talks about the ministry of the Word: "In various passages we find that the New Testament distinguishes the general service (of mercy and charity) expected of [all] believers from the particular service (of ministering the Word of God) expected of those set apart."[79] For this reason, Gordon believes that the ministers listed in verse 11 are the ones called to do "the work of ministry" rather than equipping the saints to do that work. Gordon ends his overall argument against the equipping view of verse 12 with a strong statement: "The 'equipping view' is so contrary to the natural grammar of the passage, and…the teaching of the remainder of the NT, that we cannot account for its popularity on the basis of careful biblical study. Rather, we must attribute it to the egalitarian, anti-authoritarian, populist Zeitgeist."[80] In other words, Gordon believes the ESV and other modern translations of Ephesians 4:12 are not textually grounded, but rather flow from a pre-determined ecclesiology that desires all the members of the church to minister the Word in some way.

That being said, it could also be argued that Gordon's favored translation of verse 12 (the KJV) comes with its own ecclesiological bias. Markus Barth believes this interpretation has "an aristocratic, that is, a clerical and ecclesiastical flavor; it

[79] Gordon, "Equipping Ministry in Ephesians 4?", 77.
[80] Gordon, "Equipping Ministry in Ephesians 4?", 77.

distinguishes the (mass of the) 'saints' from the (superior class of the) officers of the church."[81] To put it another way, the King James translation of verse 12 seems to suggest that the ordained ministers are the ones who do all the ministry of building up the church. However, this does not match the overall context of Ephesians 4, which presents all members of the church playing a role in building up the body. Frank Thielman explains:

> Contextually, 4:7-16 is concerned with the role of all believers in the unity of the church. In verse 7 at the beginning of the passage, "each one" receives grace "according to the measure" that Christ decides. This matches the focus of verse 16 at the end of the passage when it says that "each single part" assists the body in its growth "in the measure" for which it has been empowered.[82]

Furthermore, Ephesians 4:15 says that all believers are to speak the truth in love, not just the ministers of the church. The truth which believers are called to speak to one another is not simply true things in general, but rather the truth of the gospel. This is consistent with how Ephesians presents the idea of truth.[83] Therefore, all members of the church are called to speak the gospel to others in some way. We are all called to minister to one another by sharing the truth about Jesus and helping one another apply the gospel to all of life. As we do so, the church grows toward maturity. It grows up in every way into Christ.

Now to be clear, the ministers of Ephesians 4:11 are called to a preaching and teaching role that is distinct from other members of the church. These leaders are given the weighty responsibilities of guarding sound doctrine, shepherding the flock, and expositing the scriptures in gathered worship. Pastors are, without a doubt, set apart by

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[81] Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 479.

[82] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 278.

[83] For example, Ephesians 1:13 says, "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation…" and Ephesians 4:20-21 says, "But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus…"

God to have a unique preaching and teaching role in the church. Ephesians 4:12 describes one aspect of what is distinctive about that role. Namely, the pastor's preaching and teaching serves to equip the saints for ministry, preparing them for ministry and providing what they need to do it. John Stott says the New Testament presents a pastor as one who "helps and encourages all God's people to discover, develop, and exercise their gifts. His teaching and training are directed to this end, to enable the people of God to be a servant people, ministering actively but humbly according to their gifts…Thus, instead of monopolizing all ministry himself, he actually multiplies ministry."[84] This wonderful image of a pastor multiplying ministry within a church mirrors Jesus' strategy of multiplying his life and ministry through his disciples. Jesus never intended to personally do all the ministry of planting and establishing his church, and he does not intend for the pastors or ordained clergy to do all the ministry of growing his church.

Ephesians 4 describes the church using the metaphor of a human body. For a human body to grow toward maturity, every member must do its part. Extending this metaphor to the church means that every member of the church must minister according to his or her gifting if the church is to mature. The pastors and ministers of a church are not more important than the other members in terms of value, but they do have a unique, God-ordained role. Their training in preaching and teaching the word enables them to effectively equip the other members of the church to minister the gospel in both word and deed. Pastors are called to preach the gospel consistently, clearly, and compellingly in a wide variety of settings and to help people apply the gospel to their actual lives. As they do so, the saints are equipped, the church matures, and the mission of God goes forward.

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[84] Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 167.

A Theological Perspective on Equipping Leaders

This brings us to a theological matter. Providence Church focuses on equipping gospel-centered leaders. Why are we explicit about using the term "gospel-centered" in our definition of an equipped spiritual leader? The short answer is that we believe the gospel is central to living all of life. At the beginning of his public ministry, "Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel'."[85] Certainly Jesus did not mean for repentance and belief in the gospel to be a singular event in the life of a Christ-follower, taking place only at conversion. Rather, repentance and faith were to become the way of life for a Christian. Martin Luther made this point in the first of his 95 theses which he nailed to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517: "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said, 'Repent' (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."[86] In other words, repentance and belief in the gospel are not simply the entry point of the Christian life, they are how we live the Christian life.

Paul emphasizes this ongoing belief in the gospel in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain."[87] The verb tenses in these verses are instructive. Paul preached the gospel to the Corinthians in the past. The

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[85] Mark 1:14-15.
[86] "The 95 Theses," accessed February 25, 2020, https://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html.
[87] 1 Corinthians 15:1-2.

Corinthians received (or believed) the gospel in the past. And the Corinthians now stand on that gospel in the present. Meaning, the very thing they received in the past has become their present firm ground. Finally, the Corinthians are presently being saved by the gospel in an ongoing way as they continue to hold fast to it. In summary, Paul is reminding the Corinthians of the gospel which they heard and believed in the past, because continual belief in that gospel is the way to live out and experience their salvation in the present. Christians must keep the gospel at the center of life, because it is the fount from which our entire life in Christ flows. "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him."[88] How did we receive Christ Jesus? By grace through faith in the gospel. How do we walk in him? In the same way; by grace through faith in the gospel. The gospel is both a door and a path. It is both the means of our salvation and the means of our transformation.

Therefore, if a person is going to lead others spiritually, they must be able to help others believe the gospel and apply it to all of life. This means that an equipped spiritual leader will have gospel fluency; knowing what the gospel is and being able to talk about it naturally. Secondly, it means that an equipped spiritual leader will understand gospel application; knowing how to apply the gospel to specific areas of sin and brokenness. What follows is a brief exploration of these two aspects of gospel-centered leadership.

Gospel Fluency

A spiritual leader knows what the gospel is and can talk about it naturally. So, what is the gospel? The word "gospel" simply means good news. It is good news, not

[88] Colossians 2:6.

good advice. It is not something for us to do. It is something for us to receive and believe. It is a declaration of what God has done in the world through his Son Jesus Christ. The gospel is good news that has implications for both individual human beings and for the whole creation. In other words, the gospel is both personal and cosmic. A spiritual leader can talk about the gospel in both senses.

The Gospel is Personal

Here is a simple definition of the gospel that will help in thinking about its personal nature: *The gospel is the good news that God saves sinners through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.* Therefore, any discussion of how the gospel affects us personally must say something about God, something about our condition as sinners, and something about the person and work of Jesus.

God

The gospel starts with God. Unless we have a right understanding of God, then the gospel will not be good news to us. The defining characteristic of God is his holiness. This is the consistent witness of scripture. When Moses encountered God in the burning bush, God said to Moses, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."[89] The psalmist refers to God as the Holy One of Israel.[90] During Isaiah's encounter with God, one of the seraphim described God by crying out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his

[89] Exodus 3:5.
[90] See Psalm 71:22, Psalm 78:41, and Psalm 89:18.

glory."[91] R.C. Sproul defines holiness: "When the Bible calls God holy, it means primarily that God is transcendentally separate. He is so far above and beyond us that he seems almost totally foreign to us. To be holy is to be 'other,' to be different in a special way."[92] This means that God is not like us. He is perfect righteousness, goodness, and truth. He is not simply a really good version of us, he is completely other than us. Because of God's holiness, sinful human beings cannot approach him. When Isaiah encountered the holiness of God, he said, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips."[93] Ezekiel had a similar experience when confronted with the holiness of God: "Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face."[94] Ezekiel was literally floored by the glory of God. Human beings are undone in God's holy presence. God is holy, and we cannot approach him as we are in our sin. However, this holy God has done everything necessary to save sinners!

Sinners

Unless we have a right understanding of ourselves as sinners, then the gospel will not be good news to us. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."[95] There are a number of ways to talk about what sin is. Sin is law-breaking, transgressing the commands of God. Sin is rebellion, defying the rule of God. Sin is idolatry, worshipping false gods. No matter which way we choose to describe our sin, it runs deeper than we think it does. Sin has affected every part of who we are; our mind, our body, our will, our

[91] Isaiah 6:3.
[92] R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1985), 40.
[93] Isaiah 6:5.
[94] Ezekiel 1:28.
[95] Romans 3:23.

emotions, and our personality. That does not mean we are as bad as we could be. It just means that sin has impacted us more than we realize. Sin is pervasive, comprehensive, and deceptive. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" The Bible often uses the term "heart" to describe the control center of our lives, who we are deep down. And according to Jeremiah's words, the heart is deceitful, meaning we cannot trust ourselves. The heart is desperately sick, meaning we cannot cure ourselves. And the heart is beyond understanding, meaning we cannot accurately interpret our own motives. Sin has taken root in the deepest part of us and it works its way out into every aspect of our lives. Eugene Peterson gives a helpful definition of what it means to be a sinner:

> The word *sinner* is a theological designation…It designates humans in relation to God and sees them separated from God. *Sinner* means something is awry between humans and God. In that state people may be wicked, unhappy, anxious, or poor. Or, they may be virtuous, happy, and affluent. Those items are not part of the judgment. The theological fact is that humans are not close to God and are not serving God.[96]

The scriptures agree with this. "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you."[97] Left to our natural selves, we are "dead in our trespasses and sins."[98] In fact, "The wages of sin is death."[99] As sinners, we are spiritually dead, cut off from God, and unable to save ourselves. But the good news is that God graciously saves sinners through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

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[96] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993), 118.
[97] Isaiah 59:2.
[98] Ephesians 2:1.
[99] Romans 6:23.

Jesus

Who could reconcile the infinite gap between a holy God and sinful humans? Only one who is both God and human. Jesus of Nazareth is fully God and fully human, making him uniquely qualified to mediate between God and men. Our hope for salvation is found in Jesus alone. "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."[100] God saves sinners through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In his life, Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law of God. He was tempted in every way as we are, yet he was without sin.[101] He was perfectly righteous, even in his thoughts and motives. He never did anything contrary to the will of God. Jesus lived the life we were made to live. In his death, Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. He is the propitiation, or the atoning sacrifice, for our sins.[102] "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God."[103] Jesus died the death we deserved in order to take away the sin separating us from God. In his resurrection, Jesus conquered death, our great enemy. This is why he is the only one who can make the promise of eternal life. "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead."[104] To say that the resurrection of Jesus is the first fruits is to say that his resurrection is only the beginning of the harvest. Because of his resurrection, we have the hope of resurrection for ourselves. Death does not get the victory, life does. This is salvation indeed!

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[100] 1 Timothy 1:15.
[101] Hebrews 4:15.
[102] 1 John 2:2.
[103] 1 Peter 3:18.
[104] 1 Corinthians 15:20-21.

The gospel is the good news that God saves sinners through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This salvation is all according to God's grace, and we receive God's gift of grace through faith in Jesus. When we place our faith in Jesus, we are declared right with God, we are adopted into God's family, we are transferred from the kingdom of self and Satan into the kingdom of God, and we are forever united with Christ (he in us and us in him). God saves us personally and comprehensively through Jesus. The gospel is personal. However, the gospel has even broader implications.

The Gospel is Cosmic

The gospel tells the true story of the whole world, and it therefore impacts all of life. That story can be told in four chapters which unfold the overall narrative of the Bible: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation.

Creation

The story begins with God. Before anything else existed, there was God. The scriptures reveal that this one God has existed eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[105] God was and is sufficient in and of himself, needing nothing. And he has perfect community within himself, needing no one. However, out of his eternal goodness and sovereign power, God created all things and he declared that everything he created was very good.[106] The pinnacle of his creation was humanity. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."[107]

[105] See Matthew 28:19, John 15:26, and 2 Corinthians 13:14 as explicit statements of this.
[106] Genesis 1:31.
[107] Genesis 1:27.

Human beings have inherent dignity and value and purpose because we are created in the image of God. We were made to reflect God, depend on God, serve God, and worship God, all in the context of the good world that he created. Life is from God and for God. At creation, the world was as it should be; it was a harmonious relationship between God, humanity, and the rest of creation.

Fall

All was good at creation, but people turned from God to go their own way. Rather than honoring God and living under his authority, the first man and woman rebelled against him.[108] Sin entered the world, marring God's good creation and introducing brokenness of every kind into the world. Sin brought spiritual brokenness, alienating people from God. Sin brought psychological brokenness, alienating people from themselves. Sin brought social brokenness, alienating people from one another. And sin brought physical brokenness, alienating people from the creation itself. Indeed, the whole creation was subjected to futility because of Adam's sin.[109] The fall essentially mirrored in a negative way what had happened positively in creation. God created life, but the fall brought about death. God created order out of chaos, but the fall brought disorder to the world. God created humanity for community, but the fall brought enmity between people. God created people to be fruitful and to have dominion over the creation, but the fall made that mission difficult and burdensome. The world became broken in a way that

[108] Genesis 3:1-7.
[109] Romans 8:20.

humanity could never fix or restore. To say that the world is fallen is simply to say that every aspect of life is tainted by sin, weakness, suffering, and ultimately death.

Redemption

Humanity had no way of restoring what had been lost in the fall. It seemed that there was no hope for the world. But every good story has a hero, and the gospel story is no exception. God, in his grace, planned to redeem the world from its hopeless estate by sending a savior. God actually hinted at that savior immediately after the fall when he said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."[110] This verse is often referred to as the *protoevangelium*, meaning "the first good news." It is the first hint of the gospel: God would send a redeemer, who would be born of a woman, would be wounded, but would ultimately crush Satan and his works (sin and death). Redemption is a term of value meaning to buy back, so it necessarily involves a cost. And the full cost of redemption fell on God, specifically on the redeemer whom he sent. God sent his Son in the person of Jesus Christ to redeem the fallen world. All the curses of the fall, including our sin and its effects, were placed on Jesus Christ. "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows…he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."[111] In order to undo the fall, the redeemer had to undo both sin and death, which is exactly what Jesus did. He overcame the penalty and

[110] Genesis 3:15.
[111] Isaiah 53:4-5.

power of sin on the cross, and he reversed the curse of death in his resurrection. Through the work of Jesus, humanity now had a way to be restored to what we were made for; life in harmonious relationship with God and with one another. This is redemption!

Consummation

However, the redemption Christ secured is not only about restoring people to a relationship with God and one another. It is about restoring the whole creation back to its original good. Cornelius Plantinga writes, "If all has been created good and all has been corrupted, then all must be redeemed…and that includes the whole natural world, which both sings and groans. The whole natural world, in all its glory and pain, needs the redemption that will bring shalom."[112] This echoes Paul's words in Romans 8: "For the creation was subjected to futility…in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."[113] Hope! Yes, even though the creation now experiences the corruption of the fall, there is hope for the future when all things will be redeemed. The one who will accomplish this is Jesus himself. At his first coming, he inaugurated his kingdom and secured everything necessary for the redemption of the fallen world. The Bible calls his resurrection the first fruits of what is to come, which is the renewal of the whole world.[114] When Jesus comes again, he will consummate his kingdom and bring redemption to completion. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth…He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the

[112] Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 95-96.
[113] Romans 8:20-21.
[114] 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new'."[115] That is the good news of what is to come! That is where the story of the world is headed. Until then, we live in light of that story. We live for the glory of God and the good of the world, honest about sin and death and brokenness, but knowing they will not prevail.

This is the gospel: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation. This is the story we inhabit. Part of growing as disciples of Jesus is allowing this story to shape how we see ourselves and the world. That means we are learning to apply the gospel to all of life. Which brings us to the second aspect of gospel-centered leadership, gospel application.

Gospel Application

A spiritual leader not only knows how to fluently talk about the gospel, he or she also knows how to apply the gospel to every area of life. When a crowd asked Jesus what they must be doing to do the works of God, he replied, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."[116] The call of God is to believe in Jesus, not just one time but all the time. Believing in Jesus involves applying the gospel to specific areas of sin and brokenness. A spiritual leader knows how to do that and help others do that.

Applying the Gospel to Areas of Sin

Jesus came to free us from the penalty of sin, but he also came to free us from the power of sin. In order to experience this freedom, we must apply the gospel to the very

[115] Revelation 21:1, 4-5.
[116] John 6:29.

places where sin gets its power. Underneath every visible manifestation of sin, something deeper is going on: heart idols we love and lies we believe. Idols are simply false gods that draw our affections and worship away from the true God. We are prone to give ourselves to these idols, looking for life in them instead of in God. This false worship drives our sin. But underneath every sin, there are also lies we are believing. These false beliefs work alongside heart idols to empower sin. In order to grow in Christ, we must apply the gospel to these roots of sin, not just deal with sin on the surface.

As an example, take the sin of unrighteous anger. Most Christians recognize sinful anger in themselves and know how to appropriate God's forgiveness for it offered in the gospel. But growing in Christlikeness in this area requires a deeper application of the gospel. "The key to gospel-driven transformation is learning to repent of the 'sin beneath the sin'—the deeply rooted idolatry and unbelief that drive our more visible sins."[117] What are the heart idols underlying the anger? What am I loving or looking for that I should be finding in God alone? Is there something I am desiring more than God or trusting instead of God? Maybe it is the idol of control, and when I lack control in situations, I react in anger. Maybe it is the idol of respect, and my response to feeling disrespected is anger. I must also ask what lies I am believing that might be contributing to my anger. For example, I might believe that people should always act in a certain way or that things should always go according to plan, and I get angry if they do not. Or I might believe I can change people and circumstances through my anger, which is a lie.

In order to experience true heart change, I must apply the gospel to the idols and lies driving my sin of anger. Applying the gospel means repenting of heart idols and lies

[117] Robert H. Thune and Will Walker, *The Gospel-Centered Life* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2011), 53.

and then believing the specific promises of the gospel related to these things. For example, I turn from the idol of respect, acknowledging that I have worshipped my desire to be respected instead of worshipping God. Then I turn in faith to Jesus, believing the promises of the gospel: Jesus was disrespected, mistreated, and humbled on the cross, so that I might be fully accepted by God. Because I am in Christ, I have no need to angrily demand respect from others. Jesus has freed me from the need to live for my own respect, and I can now live for the glory of God. I also need to repent of any lies I am believing and replace them with truth. If I am believing that things should always go according to my plans, then I need to turn from that untruth. The truth is that things will not always go as I want them to go. In fact Jesus promised that in the world we will have trouble, but he also promised that he has overcome the world.[118] Rather than responding in anger to the things that trouble me, I can rest in the good news that Jesus is sovereign and powerful.

Applying the Gospel to Areas of Brokenness

God created the world good, but every aspect of the world is now broken in some way due to the fall. This affects all of life. Sin taints everything, suffering is a reality, and frustration is the norm. And yet, Jesus came to make all things new. He came to redeem not just human souls, but all of creation. This means that, in Christ, we can approach every area of life realistically, but also hopefully. We can apply the good news of the gospel to every area of our lives. Things like marriage, friendship, parenting, politics, money, work, and sexuality are all under the purview of the gospel.

[118] John 16:33.

As an example, consider what it means to apply the gospel to our work. Human work, as originally intended by God, is good. It is good because we are created in God's image, and God works. Jesus said, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."[119] Work is also good, because God calls us to it. From the very beginning God called humanity to fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion over it.[120] These commands to actively be at work filling and forming the earth show that work is part of God's good design for human beings.

However, even though work is good, it is also broken. The fall has impacted our relationship with work in many ways, and we must learn to apply the redemptive work of Jesus to all these areas of brokenness. For example, we might see work as a grind. The daily exhaustion caused by difficult people, difficult situations, and the monotony of doing the same thing can cause us to see work as drudgery rather than joy. How does Jesus redeem this broken experience of work? In other words, how can we apply the gospel to this? One way is to think in terms of vocation or calling. Jesus calls us to himself so that we might live a life of glorifying God and loving others in all we do, including our work. "You were bought with a price…so, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God."[121] Jesus first calls us to himself and then he calls us to flourish where we are planted. Our job becomes a place where we can display the worth and magnificence of God through doing good work and loving others.

Another way we might experience the brokenness of work is to see our work as our identity. We might look to our job to give us personal worth and well-being. This

[119] John 5:17.
[120] Genesis 1:28.
[121] 1 Corinthians 7:23-24.

could manifest in things like longing for approval, feeling pressure to perform, or living to please people. How do we apply the gospel to this tendency to see work as identity? Well, in Christ we are fully approved and accepted. We are pleasing to God and do not have to prove our worth. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."[122] In Jesus, we are newly created for good work. But our work is not our identity. Instead it flows from our identity. Believing the gospel reminds me that Christ, not my job, is my life.

Conclusion

The Bible demonstrates in both the Old and New Testaments that God's servants must be equipped for the mission of God. This means they must receive preparation and provision from outside themselves to carry out the purposes of God. Pastors play a role in this equipping of the saints for ministry by consistently preaching the gospel and helping others learn to apply it to all of life. A spiritual leader will not only have firsthand knowledge of the gospel but will also have the ability to help others apply it to every area of life. The next chapter will review relevant literature related to equipping these types of leaders. Specifically, it will explore books that have shaped our program to equip gospel-centered leaders at Providence Church.

[122] Ephesians 2:10.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The equipping program being tested in this thesis project is designed around four training emphases, which Providence Church considers the basic core competencies of an equipped spiritual leader: (1) Walking with God through the practice of the spiritual disciplines; (2) Understanding the spiritually formative power of habits and practices; (3) Fluency in talking about and applying the gospel; (4) A commitment to making disciples of Jesus. For each of these training emphases, a primary book was chosen to shape the content and discussion in that section of our equipping program. However, there are other relevant works that inform our understanding of these four areas and why it is so important to equip spiritual leaders in them. The purpose of this chapter is to review the primary texts used in each of these four training emphases as well as other literature related to each section.

The Spiritual Disciplines

The most important quality of a spiritual leader is that he or she is personally walking with God and growing in Christ. An authentic and growing relationship with God is what enables a person to authentically lead others in the things of God. Therefore, a critical component of equipping spiritual leaders is helping them to understand and practice the various spiritual disciplines. The book on this topic that we chose for our equipping program (Equip) was *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian* Life by Donald Whitney. This book is compelling from the outset, because Whitney begins with the end

in mind. He begins by discussing God's end goal or telos for his people, which is conformity to Christ. Scripture promises, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."[1] Every believer in Christ can be gloriously certain that God will one day perfect them by making them like Jesus. Christlikeness is our destiny! But Whitney says, "Until then God intends us to grow toward it."[2] And the means God has given by which we can grow toward conformity with Christ are the spiritual disciplines. Whitney cites 1 Timothy 4:7 as the verse that grounds his entire book: "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (NASB). In other words, the purpose of the spiritual disciplines is to grow in godliness. This is Whitney's big idea, and he keeps that idea at the forefront of the reader's mind by the way he structures the book. Each chapter title contains the phrase "for the purpose of godliness." For example, chapter 4 is called "Prayer…for the Purpose of Godliness." This reminds the reader that the end goal of practicing the discipline of prayer is to grow in godliness, which Whitney defines as "both closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ."[3]

Whitney opens the book with a chapter on the purpose of the spiritual disciplines and he concludes with a chapter on persevering in the spiritual disciplines. In between, he covers the disciplines of Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and learning. He defines the spiritual disciplines as "those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ."[4] He places emphasis on the fact that the disciplines are

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[1] Romans 8:29.
[2] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 2.
[3] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 9.
[4] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 4.

practices, not attitudes or states of mind. "There are specific practices we are to do sometimes that cultivate generally being like Jesus all the time."[5] However, he is careful to note that our diligence in practicing the disciplines is not what makes us godly: "We cannot make ourselves more like Jesus. The Holy Spirit does that, working through the Disciplines to bring us closer to Jesus and making us more like him."[6]

Each chapter of Whitney's book demonstrates how a particular discipline is developed in scripture, illustrates what that discipline might look like to be practiced in our life, and then closes with several application points. So, it is a very practical book. The reader can see himself or herself practicing these disciplines and is always reminded of their purpose. The strength of this book in equipping young spiritual leaders is that it gives a very accessible introduction to the spiritual disciplines, offering a combination of both the "how" and the "why" of the disciplines in helping a person to walk with God. Another great value of the book is its gospel-centrality. Whitney is quick to establish the fact that the disciplines are derived from the gospel and are meant to take us deeper into the gospel. If practicing the disciplines leads to legalism, pride, guilt, or shame, then we are not practicing them for the right reasons. J.I. Packer says of Whitney in the Foreword of the book: "He calls us to pursue godliness through practicing the disciplines out of a gratitude for the grace that has saved us, not as self-justifying or self-advancing effort."[7] In other words, Whitney's book is meant to equip people in practicing the spiritual disciplines as a means of walking in God's grace, not as enslavement to a new law.

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[5] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 6.
[6] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 290.
[7] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, x.

This is reminiscent of Richard Foster's classic work *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, which undoubtedly influenced Whitney's ideas on the spiritual disciplines. Foster's book, which has been revised several times since its publication in 1978, re-introduced the importance of the spiritual disciplines to the modern evangelical world. Foster contends, "God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us."[8] Like Whitney, Foster is clear that the disciplines themselves do not transform us. Only God can transform us by his grace. But he says the disciplines are the means by which we receive that transforming grace. This is the main thesis that guides Foster's book. Both he and Whitney see spiritual growth as the purpose of the disciplines, but they use different language to describe that growth. Whitney calls it growing in godliness, while Foster speaks of being transformed by God's grace and walking in the freedom of that grace. He says, "The purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines is the total transformation of the person. They aim at replacing old destructive habits of thought with new life-giving habits."[9] Later he elaborates, "The purpose of the Disciplines is freedom. Our aim is the freedom, not the Discipline…The liberation is the end; the Disciplines are *merely* the means."[10] Foster, similar to Whitney, keeps the reader focused on the end goal of the disciplines, which helps prevent the disciplines from becoming a new legalism or an empty religious system.

Foster divides the spiritual disciplines into three categories: The inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. The outward disciplines of

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[8] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, special anniversary ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018), 7.
[9] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 62.
[10] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 110.

simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. And the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. A major difference between Foster and Whitney is that Foster covers the corporate (interpersonal) disciplines in his book, whereas Whitney only deals with the personal disciplines. Foster's work is an important read for anyone seeking to grow in their understanding of how God uses the disciplines to change us. He offers practical examples of how to engage the disciplines, but he is careful to emphasize that it is not just about the mechanics of them. "The Spiritual Disciplines are an inward and spiritual reality, and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life."[11] On the other hand, he reminds the reader that the spiritual disciplines are not just attitudes. They are things that we do. "We are dealing with actions, not merely states of mind."[12] His point is that all of the disciplines are things that we practice. But we must practice them for the right reason, which is to connect with God and receive his grace.

Another important work on the spiritual disciplines is John Ortberg's *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. The title of this book gives away its big idea. Ortberg proposes that the spiritual disciplines are the means to getting the life you've always wanted. That is, they are the practices given by God to help you live your ordinary life as Jesus would live it if he were you. The first three chapters unpack this idea. Chapter 1 raises the thought that most people are disappointed with their lives, because they have not become who God made them to be. But the good news is that the kingdom of God has come near in Jesus, and God's purpose is to transform us

[11] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 3.
[12] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 105.

to be like Jesus. We have hope for change! Chapter 2 says that the goal of spiritual life is not doing "spiritual things" like reading the Bible and praying. The goal of the spiritual life is actual change. Chapter 3 then reveals the means by which change happens, which is training to be like Jesus. "Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely."[13] We do not become like Jesus by just wanting to be like him and trying to be like him. We become like Jesus by arranging our life around activities that train us to be like him, which are the spiritual disciplines. Ortberg defines a spiritual discipline as: "Any activity that can help me gain power to live life as Jesus taught and modeled it."[14]

After the introductory chapters, Ortberg covers some of the different spiritual disciplines in chapters 4-13. Each chapter is titled with something we long for (like freedom) or something broken in us (like regret), then offers a practice to either help us have the thing we long for or counter the thing broken in us. These chapters are almost devotional and often convicting in the way they talk about the spiritual life. They flesh out spiritual formation in very ordinary situations that are easy to relate to and they make you want to engage these disciplines. This is Ortberg's great contribution to the topic of the spiritual disciplines. He takes the disciplines out of the realm of the academic or the mystical and brings them into real life scenarios where ordinary people can see themselves practicing them and benefiting from them. If Whitney's book is more of a practical "how to" for the spiritual disciplines, then Ortberg's book is more of a "want to." Ortberg explores most of the traditional disciplines, just as Whitney does. However,

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[13] John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 43.
[14] Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 48.

Ortberg gets a bit more creative. For example, he suggests the practice of choosing the longest line at the grocery store to cultivate patience and eliminate hurry.[15] Or he recommends finding a "joy mentor" to help cultivate joy in one's life.[16] Whitney would likely say such practices can be spiritually helpful, but they are not spiritual disciplines in the strictest sense. Whitney limits his discussion of the disciplines to those practices modeled in the Bible. He says, "Without this limitation, we leave ourselves open to calling anything we fancy a Spiritual Discipline…[determining] for ourselves what practices are best for our spiritual health and maturity rather than accepting those God has revealed in Scripture."[17] Ortberg would agree that God has shown us specific practices in the Bible that form us spiritually. "But," he adds, "we can turn almost any activity into a 'training exercise' for spiritual life."[18] He is concerned that the reader treats all of life as an opportunity to become more like Jesus, to live like Jesus would live if he were you. "Every moment is potentially an opportunity to be guided by God into his way of living. Every moment is a chance to learn from Jesus how to live in the kingdom of God."[19]

This thought sounds like Dallas Willard, whom Ortberg acknowledges as a primary influence in the way he thinks about spiritual formation. Willard's *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* is an earlier book on the spiritual disciplines that shaped Ortberg's work. In his preface to *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Willard says, "My central claim is that we *can* become like Christ by doing

[15] Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 83.
[16] Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 69.
[17] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 6-7.
[18] Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 48.
[19] Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 54.

one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself."[20] Essentially, the main assertion of Willard's book is that we actually can become like Jesus, but that change does not come by him just "zapping" us with his grace so that we all-of-the-sudden act like him. We become like Jesus by following him in all the behind-the-scenes ways of preparation and practice that he lived out every day. The secret of following Jesus is living our total lives as he did in all the daily moments of practice and preparation. We will only act like him in "game-time" if we have imitated him in "practice." Practice is what forms us into the kind of person who can keep his commands. Like Whitney, Willard references Paul's exhortation in 1 Timothy 4:7: "Train yourself unto godliness" (RSV). Willard says about this verse, "Just as with the physical [realm], there is a specific round of activities we must do to establish, maintain, and enhance our spiritual powers. One must *train* as well as *try*."[21] That training comes in the form of the spiritual disciplines, which Willard defines as "activities undertaken to bring us into more effective cooperation with Christ and his Kingdom."[22]

In terms of how to engage with the different spiritual disciplines, Willard's book gives less practical advice than the other books referenced so far. In fact, Willard points to Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* as a better place to look for practical application. The most valuable thing that Willard brings to the discussion is an overall theology of the disciplines: Salvation is not just the status of being forgiven. It is a life to be lived, and the spiritual life is lived out bodily. So, the bodily practices of the spiritual disciplines

[20] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperOne, 1988), ix.
[21] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 98.
[22] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 156.

help form us into the kind of people God has saved us to be. In other words, they form us to be like Jesus and to live like he lived.

That is what is common to all of the books discussed here. They remind us that the spiritual disciplines are the means God has given us to grow in Christlikeness. They are the practices that help us to work out our salvation[23] and to walk by grace through faith.[24] If a spiritual leader is going to personally walk with God and disciple others to do so, then he or she must be equipped in the purpose of the spiritual disciplines and how to practice them.

The Spiritually Formative Power of Habits and Practices

The second training emphasis of Equip goes a step beyond the intentional practice of the spiritual disciplines to explore how a person's heart affections are constantly being shaped in both intentional and unintentional ways. If the heart of a spiritual leader is to love the things that God loves, then a spiritual leader must understand how our regular habits and practices are always at work forming our loves. The primary text we chose to help us consider this idea was James K.A. Smith's *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. This book is in many ways an anthropology, examining some of the fundamentals of what it means to be human: What we are, what motivates and drives us, and what shapes those desires and drives. Smith's thesis is that human beings are primarily loving beings, defined by what we desire as opposed to what we think or know. In other words, you are what you love. Smith asks, "What if the center and seat of the

[23] Philippians 2:12.
[24] Colossians 2:6.

human person is found not in the heady regions of the intellect but in the gut-level regions of the heart? How would that change our approach to discipleship and Christian formation?"[25] The answer is that we would not see discipleship as simply a matter of getting more knowledge and information about Jesus. We would see that it is about forming the heart to love Jesus and the things Jesus loves. Smith says love (or desire) is common to all human beings: "You can't not love. So, the question isn't *whether* you will love something as ultimate; the question is *what* you will love as ultimate."[26] Christians claim to love God and his kingdom as ultimate. But what forms our affections toward God and his kingdom? Smith argues that it is not just acquiring information and knowledge about God that shapes our affections for him, but rather it is participating in regular embodied practices and habits, which he calls "liturgies." The subtitle of the book, *The Spiritual Power of Habit*, rounds out Smith's thesis: Our regular habits and practices have spiritually formative power in our hearts. "We learn to love not primarily by acquiring information about *what* we should love but rather through practices that form the habits of *how* we love. These sorts of practices are 'pedagogies' of desire…rituals that form and direct our affections."[27]

After introducing his thesis in chapter 1 of *You Are What You Love*, Smith begins chapter 2 provocatively: "You might not love what you think."[28] Even if we say we love God and his kingdom, other things are always vying for our affections. That's because all of us are immersed in secular liturgies (or love-shaping rituals) that are constantly

[25] James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 7.
[26] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 10.
[27] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 21.
[28] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 27.

forming and directing our loves. Smith gives this alarming insight: "We unconsciously learn to love rival kingdoms because we don't realize we're participating in rival *liturgies*."[29] Smith presents an extended example of this by looking at the rituals, symbols, and practices found in a typical shopping mall. The mall forms people, not by teaching overt messages about the values of shopping and consuming, but by inviting people to participate as shoppers and consumers in an environment that is loaded with sensory practices and aesthetic images. There is an alternate "gospel story" embedded in the practices of the mall. This story promises to fulfill our longings and fix our shortcomings, not through a crucified Savior but through an experience of searching for and buying something new. The vision of the good life offered in this story is that true satisfaction is found in owning the nicest and newest things. The kingdom that the story wants us to love is the kingdom of consumption. But the mall doesn't explicitly tell us to love this rival kingdom. Instead it gives us a liturgy to participate in, which shapes our affections over time. Smith says that cultural liturgies like this are at work "under the hood, below the surface,"[30] unconsciously forming our affections and our allegiances. In other words, our regular habits and practices are forming us to be certain types of people who love and long for certain types of things. This means Christians must be aware of the types of cultural liturgies we are immersed in.

It also means that we need counter-liturgies that form our affections toward God and his kingdom. "If our loves can be disordered by secular liturgies, it's also true that our loves need to be reordered (recalibrated) by counter-liturgies—embodied, communal

[29] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 37.
[30] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 37.

practices that are 'loaded' with the gospel and indexed to God and his kingdom."[31] Chapters 3 and 4 of Smith's book are the meat of his application, because in them he demonstrates how the regular gathered worship of the church is the most crucial practice in our spiritual formation. In fact, he calls the church's worship "the heart of discipleship."[32] By this he means that all other aspects of our spiritual formation flow from and are nourished by our regular practice of worship. Worship, according to Smith, is not primarily an act of our expression. It is an act of our formation. He elaborates, "Worship isn't just something we do; it is where God does something *to* us. Worship is the heart of discipleship because it is the gymnasium in which God retrains our hearts."[33]

If worship is an act of formation, then the form of worship matters. According to Smith, the form of worship encompasses two things: The overall narrative arc of the worship service and the concrete practices in the service.[34] These things work together over time to reshape our hearts and direct our desires toward God and his kingdom. The narrative arc of Christian worship as Smith presents it has four chapters: Gathering, listening, communing, and sending. Those chapters retell the gospel story every week, which reminds us of our true story and redirects our hearts to our one true love. The concrete practices of the service are the way we participate in the story. These are things like singing, confession, absolution, profession, speaking peace to one another, praying, listening to God's word, eating and drinking at the table, and opening our arms to receive a benediction and commission. It is important that these practices are concrete or

[31] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 57.
[32] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 68.
[33] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 77.
[34] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 78.

embodied. Smith explains, "Christian liturgies can't just target the intellect: they also work on the body, conscripting our desires through the senses. Christian worship that will be counter-formative needs to be embodied, tangible, and visceral. The way to the heart is through the body."[35]

Chapters 5-7 of *You Are What You Love* offer helpful insights and applications related to the formative nature of household liturgies, educational liturgies, and vocational liturgies. However, the aspects of Smith's book that are most pertinent to our equipping of spiritual leaders are (1) his model of the human person as primarily a loving being (defined and motivated by our desires) and (2) his presentation of gathered worship as the key formational practice that shapes our desires toward God and his kingdom. Oftentimes the equipping of spiritual leaders focuses only on imparting knowledge and skills, while ignoring the affections of the heart. But the heart of a spiritual leader should be to love God and love people, so good equipping must take into account how the heart is formed. Smith's model is a helpful corrective to refocus the church on the power of our heart affections in determining what we live for.

That being said, the idea that our desires are powerful motivators for our actions and that our affections can be reshaped is not unique to Smith. Thomas Chalmers, 19th century Scottish pastor and theologian, explores this topic in his famous sermon *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*. The aim of the sermon is to illuminate how a person can live out the command of 1 John 2:15—"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." How does a person stop loving the world? Chalmers says there are only two options. One option is to

[35] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 85.

convince the heart of the vanity of the world and that the world is not worthy of our love. The other option is to give the heart something greater to love. According to Chalmers, the first option does not work. He argues this from human nature, asserting that we are desiring beings and our desire must have an object. "Under the impulse of desire, man feels himself urged onward in some path or pursuit of activity for its gratification."[36] Similar to James K.A. Smith, Chalmers says we can't not love, and our loves motivate our actions, propelling us in the direction of the thing we desire. You cannot expect the heart to give up on the objects of its desire (the things of the world) simply because they are shown to be temporal or foolish. Chalmers appeals to human nature when he says, "The heart must have something to cling to."[37] In other words, simply taking away the object of desire will not work. "The heart would revolt against its own emptiness. It could not bear to be so left in a state of waste and cheerless insipidity. The moralist who tries such a process of dispossession as this upon the heart is thwarted at every step by the recoil of its own mechanism."[38] Chalmers draws a helpful parallel by observing that nature hates a vacuum. Or, as John Piper illustrates in his foreword to Chalmers' sermon, the easiest way to get all the air out of a glass beaker is to fill it with water. Piper says, "We can't displace the air in the beaker with a pump as easily as we can by pouring water in. The empty beaker fights back. It hates being empty. It demands content."[39] Such is the nature of the human heart. If it is to stop loving the things of the world, then it must be given something else to love. A new affection must displace the old affections. Says

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[36] Thomas Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, The Crossway Short Classics Series (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020), 28.
[37] Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, 37.
[38] Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, 41.
[39] Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, 15.

Chalmers, "The only way to dispossess it [the heart] of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one."[40]

That new affection is God himself, his great value being displayed in the glorious message of the gospel. The hopeful news that Chalmers brings is that we actually *can* love the things of God. Our affections *can* be turned away from the world and toward him. Our tastes *can* be changed, so to speak. Chalmers says, "One taste may be made to give way to another and to lose its power entirely as the reigning affection of the mind."[41] James K.A. Smith uses this same language in *You Are What You Love* by saying that our tastes can be trained, or our hungers re-habituated.[42] If we want to stop loving junk food, then we need to replace junk food with healthy food and develop habits of eating healthy things. Over time, our new eating habits will change our tastes. It's the same in our spiritual life. Our habits shape our hungers. So, we need habits (or liturgies) that help us have a hunger for God. Smith writes, "Christian worship is the feast where we acquire new hungers—for God and for what God desires—and are then sent into his creation to act accordingly."[43] Chalmers agrees: "We know of no other way by which to keep the love of the world out of our hearts than to keep in our hearts the love of God—and no other way by which to keep our hearts in the love of God than building ourselves up on our most holy faith."[44] Arguably the most crucial way of building ourselves up in the faith over time is regular participation in the gathered worship of the church, a practice that shapes our affections because it is centered on the gospel.

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[40] Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, 49.
[41] Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, 35.
[42] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, see pp. 57-66.
[43] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 65.
[44] Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, 68.

One book that elucidates the spiritually formative power of gathered worship is Mike Cosper's *Rhythms of Grace*. Cosper's big idea is that, because the gospel is central to the Christian life, our Christian worship services should rehearse the gospel story and thereby form people in it. He connects the practice of worship with the gospel by saying, "The gospel is actually all about worship, once broken by sin, now restored in Jesus. Worship, too, is all about the gospel, rehearsing the story and allowing it to shape the lives of the worshiping church."[45] In chapters 1-4 of *Rhythms of Grace*, Cosper unpacks the story of worship throughout the scriptures, from its beginning in Eden to its brokenness in the wilderness to its reestablishment through Israel to its restoration in Jesus. Like Smith and Chalmers, Cosper argues from human nature that we are created to worship. We are made to ascribe ultimate worth to something. But in our fallenness, we end up worshipping idols, giving ourselves to false gods. However, God in his grace redeems a people for himself and provides the means for worship, the means for entering his holy presence. We see this restoration of worship recounted in Israel's history and then brought to fruition in Jesus Christ. Cosper succinctly explains how Jesus restores true worship: "In a single event, Jesus revolutionizes worship. By offering his body as a sacrifice for us, he makes it possible for the unholy to enter the presence of the holy… The temple—the intersection of heaven and earth—finds its new locus in the person of Jesus."[46] To summarize chapters 1-4 of Cosper's book, the story of worship is the story of the gospel: "God creates, sin corrupts, but Christ redeems. And all of us get to sing along."[47]

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[45] Mike Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2013), 19.
[46] Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace*, 66.
[47] Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace*, 72.

The remaining chapters of *Rhythms of Grace* are principally about the purpose of worship and the formative power of liturgy. While Cosper acknowledges two contexts for the worship of the church, scattered and gathered, his book is primarily about the formative power of gathered worship in shaping our identity as God's people. In fact, Cosper says that the goal of gathered worship is spiritual formation.[48] Here, Cosper references the work of James K.A. Smith on the spiritual power of habit. He says, "Smith…distinguishes between practices that are thin (and less meaningful, like brushing our teeth) and thick (more meaningful, teaching us to love and desire deeply, and shaping identity)."[49] In those terms, "Gathering with the church is a habit we form, and it's a 'thick' habit, one that profoundly forms us."[50] The way it forms us is by regularly rehearsing the story of the gospel, which shapes our hearts and minds and begins to shape the way we live our day-to-day lives. Cosper's most practically helpful chapter is chapter 8, where he discusses the role of liturgy in rehearsing the gospel story in corporate worship. He contends that liturgy is formative, because it is a rhythm of gospel-shaped practices that teach us implicitly over time. "The goal of our gatherings should be to cultivate practices that form our church to live in the good news of the gospel."[51] And these practices do not merely involve our passive observation (as if watching a concert), they call for our active participation in every part of the service. Echoing Smith, Cosper says, "Christian worship recognizes the fact that we're embodied creatures, engaging the whole person in the reenactment of the gospel story."[52]

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[48] Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace*, chapter 6.
[49] Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace*, 93.
[50] Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace*, 93.
[51] Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace*, 121.
[52] Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace*, 124.

Along these same lines, Mark Galli's *Beyond Smells and Bells* is another brief but important work on the formative power of Christian liturgy. Galli states the purpose of his book on the first page: "The book is an attempt to explain how liturgy shapes us as we participate in it week after week, year after year."[53] When Galli uses the term "liturgy," he is not thinking of the practice of a particular tradition, rather he means the gospel-shaped order of a worship service that is common to many traditions. He says:

> The liturgy—whose basic outline is the same in all these traditions—remains the staple of Sunday worship and daily prayer for millions for a reason; it allows people to enter into an enduring story that makes sense of life, and allows them to enter into communion with God in a way that touches body, mind, and soul.[54]

In the first chapter of *Beyond Smells and Bells*, Galli gives the basic outline of a common Christian liturgy: Gathering, Word, Sacrament, and Dismissal.[55] Then each of the next thirteen chapters highlights a particular benefit of the liturgy or a way that it forms us (such as how it draws us into community, or how it helps us meet God, or how it changes our sense of place or time, or how it teaches us the faith).

One of Galli's greatest contributions to this subject is that he takes the reader beyond the surface rituals and words of liturgical worship to demonstrate how God uses liturgy to show us himself and transform us. This transformation comes through the power of the gospel, as we live out the gospel story through "public services"[56] over time. Galli writes, "The liturgy teaches us *about* the story, especially in Word and Sacrament. But it does more. It also *embodies* the Christian story in its very structure."[57] As we enter

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[53] Mark Galli, *Beyond Smells and Bells: The Wonder and Power of Christian Liturgy* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2008), 9.
[54] Galli, *Beyond Smells and Bells*, 10.
[55] This is very similar to James K.A. Smith's narrative arc of Christian worship: Gathering, Listening, Communing, and Sending (see p. 96 of *You Are What You Love*).
[56] "Liturgy comes from the Greek word meaning 'a public service'." Galli, *Beyond Smells and Bells*, 14.
[57] Galli, *Beyond Smells and Bells*, 18.

into and participate in this story week after week, we are not only learning about the gospel objectively, we are coming to know it subjectively. This aligns with James K.A. Smith's idea of what it means to actually learn and know something. It is not merely the transfer of information about a subject or mastering a set of facts. Knowing something subjectively only comes as we live it. The liturgy invites us to really know the gospel by experiencing it, to truly learn it by participating in it. Like Smith and Cosper, Galli emphasizes the embodied nature of liturgical worship and why it is important that all our senses are engaged in worship. "Bodily worship prepares us with bodily exercises, so to speak, to get us into shape to serve the world."[58] This is spiritual formation! Worship in the body forms our hearts in the knowledge and love of God, preparing us for life in the real world. Galli refers to this knowledge and love of God as "spiritual intelligence" or "soul intelligence."[59] Then he says, "Soul intelligence is not easily developed. It requires years and years of practice, submitting oneself to spiritual disciplines and routines—the chief one being corporate worship…But years and years of practice requires perseverance."[60]

This is much of what we are driving at in our equipping of spiritual leaders through Equip. We want to help them walk with God for a lifetime and become the kind of people who instinctively act, think, and love like Jesus. This will not only happen as they individually practice the spiritual disciplines, but also as their affections are formed through participation in gospel-shaped, kingdom-focused corporate worship. This habit, maybe more than any, molds the hearts of God's people to be like Jesus.

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[58] Galli, *Beyond Smells and Bells*, 87.
[59] Galli, *Beyond Smells and Bells*, 107-109.
[60] Galli, *Beyond Smells and Bells*, 109.

Gospel Fluency

The third core competency of spiritual leadership covered in Equip is gospel fluency. Our aim is to help emerging spiritual leaders grow in their ability to naturally talk about the gospel, apply the gospel, and understand how the gospel works in sanctification. Tim Chester's *You Can Change* served as our content for this training emphasis. This book not only provides an in-depth discussion of what the gospel is and how it works in a person's life, it also provides an opportunity to personally practice gospel application. The title of the book gives away its big idea. You actually *can* change. There is hope for change in your sinful behavior and negative emotions. Chester writes, "This book is about *hope*. It's about the hope we have in Jesus, hope for forgiveness, but also hope for change."[61] Then he establishes the focus and direction for the rest of the book by saying, "We're not changed by systems or rules. We need a Redeemer to set us free, and we have a great Redeemer in Jesus. This book points to Jesus and explains how faith in Jesus leads to change, what theologians call sanctification or becoming more like Jesus."[62] The overall flow of *You Can Change* takes the reader through the process of sanctification, beginning with identifying a specific area of desired change and ending with what it means to persevere for a lifetime of change. The book has a personal "change project" built into it, which means the reader is to pick an area of sin or brokenness where they would like to see change. Then each chapter of the book is titled with a question that guides the change process, and each chapter ends with a guided opportunity to work through a specific area of the change project.

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[61] Tim Chester, *You Can Change: God's Transforming Power for Our Sinful Behavior and Negative Emotions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 9.
[62] Chester, *You Can Change*, 9.

Chapter 1 begins with the end in mind. If we are Christians, then conformity with Christ is our destiny. Therefore, the goal of change is to become like Jesus, who is the image of God. Just as Donald Whitney established that the purpose of the spiritual disciplines is growth in godliness, so Tim Chester establishes that the aim of change is Christlikeness. "Jesus isn't just good for us—he is good itself. He *defines* good. The secret of gospel change is being convinced that Jesus is the good life and the fountain of all joy."[63] In contrast, chapter 2 points out some of the possible wrong motivations for change, such as proving ourselves to God, to others, or to ourselves. And chapter 3 highlights some faulty approaches to change, such as legalism, self-help, and self-righteousness. Change does not happen as we try to prove ourselves or improve ourselves, but as we live out of God's total acceptance of us in Christ and by the power of his Spirit within us. He does the work of change in us, but we get to participate in it by faith. Chester gives a good summary of sanctification by saying, "Salvation from start to finish is God's work, in which we are active participants through faith and repentance by the grace of God."[64] Beginning in chapter 4 and continuing through the rest of the book, Chester walks the reader through the process of what ongoing repentance and faith looks like in a person's life. He says it starts in the heart: "There is a twofold problem in the heart: What we think or trust and what we desire or worship."[65] In order to change from our sinful habits and patterns, we must identify specific lies underneath our sin and turn from those lies (repentance) and turn to God's truth (faith). We must also turn away from sinful desires and idols (repentance) and turn our worship to Jesus (faith). This is

[63] Chester, *You Can Change*, 15.
[64] Chester, *You Can Change*, 55.
[65] Chester, *You Can Change*, 69.

because, "We serve whatever our hearts desire most…We are changed by faith as we look upon the glory of God and so find him more desirable than anything sin might offer."[66] Repentance and faith is a lifetime rhythm that leads to real change, because it is an ongoing turning from self and turning to Jesus. He is where real life is found!

The great strength of *You Can Change*, especially for an equipping class, is that it is thoroughly practical. From start to finish, the reader learns to apply the gospel to their actual life by working through the change project. The book encourages heart introspection, personal investigation of the truths of scripture, honesty about what prevents us from change, and hope in the inevitability of change. The hopefulness of this book is what makes it so refreshing to work through. But it is not just hopeful, it is honest. Chester makes it clear that change takes a lifetime, and it will not be complete until our glorification. *You Can Change* equips the reader in gospel fluency because it is entirely gospel-centered, saturated in scriptural truth about Christ and the sanctifying power of our union with him.

Another important book that helps Christians understand how the gospel works in transforming us is *The Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges. Is growth in Christlikeness brought about by our own effort or by the grace of God? Bridges' answer to that question is "yes." The first few pages of his book establish the idea that we cannot simply change ourselves into Christlike people through our own work, because spiritual transformation is primarily a work of God's grace. However, even though that is true, God still involves us in the transformation process through our disciplined effort. Bridges says, "Grace and the personal discipline

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[66] Chester, *You Can Change*, 101 and 103.

required to pursue holiness are not opposed to one another. In fact, they go hand in hand."[67] Bridges' purpose in writing *The Discipline of Grace* is to hold grace and discipline together as inseparable elements of the sanctification process.

The first six chapters of the book exposit and extol the glories of God's grace. Essentially, they help the reader establish greater gospel fluency, showing that we never outgrow the grace of God as Christians. Bridges says Christians need the gospel every day: "Only a continuous reminder of the gospel of God's grace through Christ will keep us from falling into good-day—bad-day thinking, wherein we think our daily relationship with God is based on how good we've been."[68] He goes on to say, "We are simultaneously saints and sinners."[69] Even our good works are tainted by sin, so there is never a time when we don't need the grace of the gospel. One of the great strengths of this book is its emphasis on our union with Christ as the thing that enables our sanctification. As Christians, we are in Christ and Christ is in us, which gives us "all the resources we need to become in fact what we have become in status."[70] Because of our union with Christ, we are delivered from the penalty of sin, dead to the dominion of sin, and alive to God just like Jesus is. To be "in Christ" means that we stand squarely in his grace and that we are being conformed to his image. Bridges excels at demonstrating why the gospel is such good news in every way; why it is so much more than a ticket to heaven. God does not merely save us from the penalty of sin and then leave us on our own to figure out how to live. He frees us from sin's reign in our life and then provides

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[67] Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2006), 13.
[68] Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 21.
[69] Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 40.
[70] Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 77.

the means by which we can become like Jesus. In other words, we enter the Christian life by grace and we grow in it by grace. Bridges assures us, "God never saves people and leaves them alone to continue in their immaturity and sinful lifestyle."[71] The goal of his grace toward us is our transformation. This is exactly the point that Tim Chester makes in *You Can Change*. We can know that our sanctification is inevitable, because God is at work conforming his children to the image of Christ. This is grace!

Chapter 7 of *The Discipline of Grace* transitions to what Bridges calls "our role" in sanctification, which is discipline. Much like the authors of the spiritual disciplines books reviewed in this chapter, Bridges emphasizes things that *we must do* in order to grow spiritually. We do not cause the growth, but it does not happen without our participation. We do not grow in holiness by simply being passive. On the other hand, we do not grow in holiness simply through self-discipline. We grow in holiness by what Bridges calls *dependent discipline*.[72] This means we discipline ourselves to do and pursue certain things that will grow us in Christlikeness, but our discipline is always dependent on the Holy Spirit. Bridges elaborates, "He does not do the work for us; rather he enables us to do the work…He does not live his life through me. Rather, as I depend on him, he enables *me* to live a life pleasing to him." Whereas Tim Chester describes our role in the sanctification process as ongoing repentance and faith, Jerry Bridges places all the things we do to participate in sanctification under the heading of "discipline." He dedicates the last five chapters of his book to discussing various types of Christian discipline.[73] All of

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[71] Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 82.

[72] "Dependent Discipline" is the title of chapter 8 of *The Discipline of Grace*. It is a good two-word summary of the big idea of the book.

[73] The discipline of commitment, the discipline of convictions, the discipline of choices, the discipline of watching, and the discipline of adversity.

these involve certain actions and attitudes on our part. But we cannot do them apart from God's Spirit and his ongoing grace. God enables us to do things like being watchful in temptation, or saying no to sin, or putting sin to death. Bridges draws from the wisdom of Puritans like John Owen to describe how we participate in our own sanctification through our regular mortification of sin and our vivification unto new life. These things are a work of God (we have been crucified with Christ and raised with him) that we actively participate in (we are to put off the old self and put on the new self). This is Bridges' book in a nutshell. Christians grow as we discipline ourselves to live in light of God's grace. We do this by continually coming back to the gospel. "Our faith must be constantly nourished by feeding on the gospel…[no discipline] is more important than the discipline of continually feeding your soul on the truth of the gospel."[74] This is why gospel fluency is so important in the life of a Christian, especially in a spiritual leader.

Jeff Vanderstelt's *Gospel Fluency* is a short volume dedicated to equipping believers in that very thing. The subtitle of the book gives the aim of the book: "Speaking the truths of Jesus into the everyday stuff of life." This is very similar to the mission of Providence Church, which is to help people believe and apply the gospel in every area of life. So, this book is a valuable resource for our church's equipping goals. Part 1 of the book defines what gospel fluency is and why we need it. Vanderstelt says, "You gain fluency in a language when you…[begin] interpreting all of life through that new language. It happens when you can think, feel, and speak in a language."[75] As Christians, we need to be able to do more than speak bits and pieces of the gospel. We need to

[74] Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 127.
[75] Jeff Vanderstelt, *Gospel Fluency* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 40.

understand and interpret the whole world through the truths of the gospel, because the gospel has the power to change everything. According to Vanderstelt, gaining fluency in the gospel is just like gaining fluency in any other language. It does not happen best in a classroom. It comes through being immersed in a culture that speaks that language, and it comes through continuous practice of the language. In other words, you become fluent in the gospel "through immersion in a gospel-speaking community and through ongoing practice."[76] That means the gospel must shape the culture of a church if that church wants its members to learn to speak it fluently and apply it to all of life. To that end, Part 2 of the book clarifies what the gospel is by looking at the story of the gospel, the power of the gospel, and the role of faith in experiencing the gospel. Then Parts 3-5 show how the gospel works in us personally, how it shapes a community, and how it best goes forth to others who have not yet believed.

Part 3 is essentially about personal application of the gospel. I will not be fluent in the gospel if it is not good news to me personally. So, the real question is whether or not the gospel is at work changing me. In chapter 9, Vanderstelt takes the reader through a process of applying the gospel that is very similar to our Gospel Change Flow Diagram used in Quarter 3 of Equip.[77] Vanderstelt utilizes a comparable diagram to show that gospel change happens as we observe sinful fruit in our lives and then trace it to the root (the false things we are believing about God and ourselves). Once we get to the root of our sinful behavior, we repent of those beliefs and confess our faith in the true things that the gospel tells us about God and ourselves. This produces spiritual fruit or Christlikeness

[76] Vanderstelt, *Gospel Fluency*, 43.
[77] See the Gospel Change Flow Diagram in Appendix B, p. 158.

in our lives. It is no surprise that this model of applying the gospel summarizes much of Tim Chester's model in *You Can Change*, as Vanderstelt references Chester's work.[78]

In Part 4, Vanderstelt looks at some of the ways we grow in gospel fluency by being immersed in a gospel-fluent community. This includes things like celebrating the gospel through meals, pointing each other to Jesus as better than anyone or anything we might look to or long for, and learning to tell our own stories with Jesus as the hero. Finally, Part 5 of the book highlights how to effectively share the gospel with those who do not yet know Christ. If we are going to fluently speak the gospel to others in a way that is actually good news to them, then we must really listen to them, drawing out the longings and concerns of their heart by asking good questions. We must not only declare the truths of Jesus with our lips, but we must also display the truths of Jesus with our lives. And we must grow in wisdom and in our love for people. These are the things that will make our lives attractive and create a thirst for the gospel in others.

Vanderstelt writes with the heart and style of an equipper. In fact, he says, "I'm all about training people."[79] That is the great strength of *Gospel Fluency*. It is essentially an equipping manual on what the gospel is, how it works in sanctification, how it shapes a community, and how to share it winsomely with others. One potential weakness of the book is that the conversations in Vanderstelt's illustrations sometimes come across as overly simple. Meaning they always seem to work out perfectly, or he always knows exactly what to say in a given situation. These conversations illustrate his points, but they do not always ring true to real life. However, maybe the nature of writing a training

[78] See p. 87 in *Gospel Fluency*.
[79] Vanderstelt, *Gospel Fluency*, 94.

manual requires the author to give examples of how conversations *might* go, so that the reader can practice speaking the gospel in a variety of situations. Overall, *Gospel Fluency*, *You Can Change*, and *The Discipline of Grace* together provide a working theology of the gospel and practical opportunities to apply it. This is the kind of gospel fluency we are aiming for in our equipping of spiritual leaders.

Making Disciples

The final training emphasis of Equip is focused on growing the participants in their conviction to make disciples of Jesus and growing their confidence to do so. An equipped spiritual leader not only walks with Jesus, he or she also make disciples of Jesus. Robert Coleman's classic *The Master Plan of Evangelism* was the primary text we used to guide our exploration of this topic. Coleman's main assertion in this book is that the New Testament reveals Jesus' personal strategy for taking the gospel to the world and building his church, which was to make disciples who would carry on his mission after he was gone. Coleman's work is based on the premise that the New Testament gospel accounts not only show who Christ is and what he came to do, but they also show his example of how he wants his followers to live. "This is why the scriptural accounts of Jesus constitute our best, and only inerrant, textbook on evangelism."[80] Coleman examines Jesus' method of evangelism by offering eight "guiding principles"[81] of his plan: Selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision, and reproduction. Each chapter of the book develops one of these principles

[80] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1993), 16.
[81] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 18.

by first looking at how Jesus lived it out and then showing how it applies to the church today.

Chapter 1 shows that Jesus selected a few teachable disciples to whom he would give himself. This was his method. Coleman asks, "Why did Jesus deliberately concentrate his life on comparatively so few?"[82] The answer is that, "Jesus was not trying to impress the crowd but to usher in a kingdom. This meant he needed people who could lead the multitudes."[83] In other words, he needed disciples who could make disciples. So, he selected a few and taught them. Much of that teaching came informally as the disciples were simply with him, which is what Chapter 2 is about. Coleman observes, "Having called his men, Jesus made a practice of being with them. This was the essence of his training program—just letting his disciples follow him."[84] There is no substitute in discipleship for time spent together, where the newer Christian can observe the older Christian walk with Christ and minister in his name. However, Jesus expected much more from his disciples than for them to simply spend time with him. Chapter 3 establishes the fact that Jesus expected his disciples to live a life consecrated unto him. When Jesus called his disciples to follow him, he meant for them to follow him with their whole lives, surrendering everything to him and holding nothing back. Similarly, we must help disciples count the cost when we call them to follow Jesus. The way to life goes through the cross. Thankfully, Jesus did not expect consecrated obedience from his disciples without giving them everything they needed to live that way. Chapter 4 is about how Jesus gave himself away for his disciples and for the world. The disciples were

[82] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 28.
[83] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 28.
[84] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 33.

called to do the same; to love as they were loved and to give as they had received. Significantly, Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to his disciples and to all subsequent disciples, and the Spirit enables us to live like Jesus. This means he has equipped us with everything necessary to imitate his plan of making disciples!

Chapters 5-7 are about demonstration, delegation, and supervision. Demonstration means that Jesus showed his disciples how to live, giving them a model to imitate. In the same way, a disciple-maker today is to flesh out Christianity, demonstrating things like evangelism, prayer, and Bible study. Delegation speaks to the fact that Jesus gave his disciples assignments by which they could learn how to carry out his mission. Just as Jesus sent out his original disciples, so he sends us. Coleman emphasizes, "Christian disciples are sent men and women."[85] This is what we hope all the members of our church will believe about themselves, but certainly our equipped leaders. Supervision simply means that Jesus followed up with his disciples after giving them assignments, helping them to continue to learn and encouraging them to keep going. Chapter 8 emphasizes the fact that Jesus expected his disciples to bear fruit and multiply. "Jesus intended for the disciples to produce his likeness in and through the church being gathered out of the world."[86] We do not advance his mission by recruiting masses of people. We advance his mission by reproducing his life in others.

The Epilogue of *The Master Plan of Evangelism* gives a wonderful charge and practical instructions for personally putting Jesus' plan into action. What is so motivating about Jesus' strategy is that it is person-to-person and it feels immensely doable, because

[85] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 79.
[86] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 89.

the call is to start small and invest in just a few people like Jesus did, praying that the investment multiplies over time. Coleman's explanation of Jesus' strategy helps root the reader's convictions about disciple-making in the Bible, since the New Testament is his primary source. Also, Coleman shows that Jesus' plan is not beholden to any particular method, so it allows for great creativity and contextualization. It is a call to build healthy churches by building disciples. This happens in very personal and organic ways as normal people live in the power of the Spirit and pass on their faith to others. The genius of Jesus' strategy is that it involves all Christians in the Great Commission. Coleman calls every member of the church to be involved in the ministry of disciple-making, not just the pastors.

An important book that helps churches think along these lines is *The Trellis and the Vine* by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne. The title of the book is a metaphor about the different types of work in the church. Vine work is ministering the gospel and making disciples. Trellis work is tending to the structures and support systems that enable vine work to happen. In the life of a church, trellis work can easily crowd out vine work, because it is often easier, more visible, and more concrete. But according to Marshall and Payne, the Great Commission in Matthew 28 "makes disciple-making the normal agenda and priority of every church and every Christian disciple."[87] They continue, "Thus the goal of Christian ministry is quite simple, and in a sense measurable: Are we making and nurturing genuine disciples of Christ? ... Our goal is to grow the vine, not the trellis."[88] If

[87] Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, N.S.W.: Matthias Media, 2009), 13.
[88] Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 14.

growing the vine is the goal of ministry, it will affect everything about how a church operates. That is what this book is about.

Chapter 2 of *The Trellis and the Vine* covers a number of mindset shifts that will need to happen if a church wants to focus on growing the vine. Marshall and Payne say, "Most churches need to make a conscious shift—away from erecting and maintaining structures, and towards growing people who are disciple-making disciples of Christ."[89] Relevant to this thesis project, the authors emphasize that a church must focus more on training and building people than on running events and programs. "We should concentrate on training, which increases the number and effectiveness of gospel communicators."[90]

Chapters 3-5 delve into the scriptures to look at what vine work is, who is called to do vine work, and what motivates vine work. The Bible shows that God is growing the vine of his kingdom throughout the world as the gospel goes forth and bears fruit. So, vine work happens whenever "a Christian brings truth from God's word to someone else, praying that God would make that word bear fruit through the inward working of his Spirit."[91] Who does this work? Echoing Robert Coleman, Marshall and Payne say it is not just the pastors and evangelists who are called to do vine work. Every Christian is. "To be a disciple is to be a disciple-maker."[92] If that is true, then equipping is simply helping Christians be more truly Christian. And one aspect of the work of a pastor, according to Ephesians 4:11-12, is equipping members of the church to do vine work.

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[89] Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 17.
[90] Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 19.
[91] Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 39.
[92] Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 43.

Chapters 6-9 take a closer look at the importance of training Christians for vine work. The goal of training, according to Marshall and Payne, is helping people grow in three Cs: Conviction (beliefs), character (godliness), and competency (skills and abilities).[93] The authors go on to say, "Training is the engine of gospel growth. Under God, the way to get more gospel growth happening is to train more and more mature, godly Christians to be vine workers."[94] This is the whole goal of our Equip program! As pastors begin to see themselves as trainers rather than just clergymen or CEOs, then more and more people in the church will be equipped to make disciples and minister to others. This not only creates a culture in the church where members are on mission together, it also brings about a multiplication of gospel growth by raising up co-workers to minister alongside the pastoral staff in doing outreach, follow-up, discipleship, and training. Chapters 10-12 offer some practical steps in how to look for and apprentice future vocational ministers and how to create a culture of disciple-making in a church.

While *The Master Plan of Evangelism* is largely written for lay Christians, *The Trellis and the Vine* is geared toward pastors and vocational ministers. Specifically, it is aimed at helping pastors lead their church to be a community of disciple-making disciples rather than a religious institution. Nevertheless, any Christian would benefit from reading this book, because it will fortify their conviction that they too are called to vine work. Much of how Providence Church thinks about equipping leaders is shaped by the philosophy in this book. We want to be a church that emphasizes gospel growth, meaning the gospel going deeper into the lives of people and also extending outward to new

[93] Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 78 and 85.
[94] Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 90.

people and places. We also want our church culture to be characterized by raising up multiplying disciples. That being said, it is easy as a pastor to gravitate towards trellis work. The work of managing and maintaining the structures of the church has a way of pushing Jesus' call to make disciples to the margins. *The Trellis and the Vine* is a healthy corrective to this and worth revisiting regularly.

Another book related to how Providence Church thinks about making disciples is Jonathan Dodson's *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*. Dodson introduces his reason for writing by saying, "Knowingly or unknowingly, everyone puts something in the center of discipleship."[95] Whether it's a system of spiritual disciplines, a list of righteous rules, the pursuit of personal piety, the practice of evangelism, or some other good thing, every Christian puts something at the center of their view of discipleship. Dodson contends that the gospel of grace should be at the center, because the gospel is what makes and matures disciples. This is his big idea. The book unfolds in three parts. Part 1 looks at the definition of discipleship. Part 2 deals with the motivation of discipleship. Finally, Part 3 offers thoughts on the practice of discipleship.

In Part 1, Dodson notes that the word "disciple" is used more often in the Bible to describe believers in Christ than the word "Christian." Being a disciple is a matter of fundamental identity for a Christian. Dodson says there are three aspects of a disciple's identity. "A disciple is rational (learner), relational (family), and missional (missionary) … A disciple of Jesus, then, is someone who learns the gospel, relates in the gospel, and communicates the gospel. In short, disciples are gospel-centered."[96] If we put something

[95] Jonathan K. Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 19.
[96] Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 31 and 38.

besides the gospel at the center of discipleship, we go awry. Because then it becomes about our performance rather than what Jesus is doing in us. Dodson reminds us that the goal of discipleship is conformity with the image of Christ, and he says that we must fight for that image by faith. He explains what he means by fight: "Biblical fighting is a spiritual contending to believe the truth of the gospel."[97]

Part 2 of the book distinguishes between wrong and right motivations for discipleship and then highlights the power source of discipleship. Two wrong (or twisted) motivations for discipleship that Dodson mentions are religious performance and spiritual license. The problem with both of these motivations is that they are centered on rules, either keeping the rules or breaking them. In contrast, "The gospel steeps our hearts in a new motivation of grace, which neither flaunts disobedience nor feigns obedience."[98] Gospel-centered motivations for discipleship are religious affection, believing God's warnings and promises, and ongoing repentance. These three things work together as grace-based motivations to follow Jesus. But we cannot live out these motivations in our own strength and resolve. We need God. "The Spirit is the motivation behind the motivation, the personal presence of God's power inclining us to believe the gospel."[99] Dodson's thoughts on what it means to commune with the Spirit and surrender to the Spirit are an edifying read for any disciple of Jesus.

Part 3 deals with how the church can pursue the practice of discipleship, and Dodson helpfully warns against treating discipleship as an individualistic undertaking. The gospel must be applied in community and on mission with others. Dodson says that

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[97] Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 57.
[98] Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 73.
[99] Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 101.

when we become a Christian, we experience three conversions. "We are converted to Christ, to the church, and to mission."[100] In other words, the gospel gives us a relationship with Christ, a place in God's family, and a purpose in God's mission. Therefore, discipleship cannot be reduced to just growing in my personal relationship with Christ, or just experiencing community, or just engaging in mission. Discipleship involves all of these things and keeping the gospel at the center will result in all three. This aligns with how Providence Church talks about gospel-centrality. We envision three overlapping circles in a Venn Diagram: Gospel content (a message to be preached), gospel community (a people formed by God's grace), and gospel cause (God's mission to renew all things). Discipleship centered on the gospel will always involve ongoing learning of the content of the gospel, living as a member of God's family, and living as a missionary (a sent one). This is essentially Dodson's definition of discipleship from chapter 1.

Dodson's practical suggestions for living out discipleship are in the form of peer-to-peer groups, which he calls "fight clubs." These are small groups of believers fighting sin together, fighting to believe and apply the gospel together, and fighting for the image of Christ to be formed in them. This is in contrast to Coleman's model in *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, which presents discipleship in more of a mentor/mentee format. The strength of Dodson's model is that encourages any and all to jump into the process of discipleship without worrying about having all the answers or being fully equipped as a disciple-maker. A possible pitfall in Dodson's model is that it does not necessarily encourage one person to step in and lead the process of discipleship. Coleman highlights

[100] Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 108.

the necessity of intentionality in disciple-making, which involves more mature Christians taking the initiative to pass on their faith to younger Christians. However, Dodson offers a healthy reminder that discipleship is more than just passing on the faith. He says, "Making disciples requires not only sharing our faith, but also sharing our lives—failures and successes, disobedience and obedience."[101] We will certainly not be willing to share our lives in this way if we are not secure in the grace of God through Jesus. This is why the gospel of grace must be at the center of discipleship. And this is why we are specifically focused on equipping gospel-centered leaders at Providence Church. The next chapter lays out the project I designed to test my thesis of how to best equip these kinds of leaders.

[101] Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 15.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

My thesis is that we can effectively equip young leaders with the basic core competencies necessary for gospel-centered leadership through a one-year mentored cohort designed around four training emphases, with a focus on reading, interaction, practical projects, and relationships. The project designed to test this thesis is made up of two parts: The first part was running the one-year equipping program in 2018 and 2019. The second part was evaluating the effectiveness of that program using self-assessments from the participants. This chapter explains the project design in three sections: (1) The program objectives, or why we did it; (2) The program description, or what we did; (3) The program evaluation, or how we assessed it.

Program Objectives

The pastoral staff of Providence Church determined in late 2016 that it was necessary to begin equipping an increasing number of young spiritual leaders to keep up with the leadership needs of our growing and ever-changing congregation. Our stated purpose was to equip an invited group of emerging young leaders to grow in becoming multiplying disciples of Jesus and effective spiritual leaders. We essentially wanted to equip them in some of the basics of walking with God personally and leading others spiritually.

We identified four objectives that our equipping program (which we call “Equip”) needed to accomplish in the lives of the participants: (1) Growth in their commitment to

personally walk with God through regular engagement in the spiritual disciplines; (2) Developing a broader view of spiritual formation by considering how our practices shape our affections; (3) Growth in gospel fluency by learning to apply the gospel to specific areas of sin and brokenness; (4) Strengthening their conviction to be people who make disciples of Jesus (i.e. spiritually multiply) and increasing their confidence to do so.

Program Description

Overview

Having established the objectives of Equip, we needed to determine the best format to accomplish those objectives. We decided that a classroom format was not the best approach. Even though a classroom would allow us to cover more content, it would not provide the necessary relationship-building and cross-discipleship that we felt would make the equipping most impactful. Our desire was for Equip to feel more like a small group than a class, giving the participants a chance to process the content in community rather than simply listening to lectures.

We also needed to decide on the time frame of the program. It was important to have ample time for relationships of trust and accountability to develop and for the group to form an identity. We wanted the participants to see themselves as a community of young leaders who were being called to take ownership of their own spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of others within the church. This kind of identity formation and relational accountability could only happen over a substantial amount of time. Having

more time would also provide the benefit of pastoral interaction with these young leaders, giving us a chance to assess their readiness for spiritual leadership.

It was decided that Equip should be made up of a ten to twenty-person cohort that would meet over the course of an entire calendar year (January through December). The year would be divided into four quarters, and each quarter would focus on a particular topic. Our rhythm would be to meet for seven to eight consecutive weeks covering one topic. Then we would take a few weeks off for rest, rejuvenation, and reflection before beginning the next topic. The meetings would be co-led by my wife and me, and they would take place on Wednesday mornings from 6:30-8:00 AM at our church office.

The first quarter of the year would focus on personally walking with God through the spiritual disciplines. The second quarter would explore how daily practices form our loves, and how the practice of worship forms us in loving the things of God. The third quarter would look at how the gospel works in sanctification by learning to apply the gospel to a specific area of life. And the fourth quarter would focus on Jesus' mission to make disciples. The content for each quarter would include reading one book, interacting over the book with the other members, and doing a simple practical project that applies the particular training emphasis to real life. In addition, the group meetings would have informal time built in for relational connection. And finally, there would be smaller groups that would meet for accountability and prayer during the time between quarters.

The Participants

We implemented Equip in pilot form in 2017. Our pastoral staff identified a group of emerging leaders to invite into the program. Our primary criteria for inviting them was

that we saw these people as potential "next GC leaders" in our church. As mentioned in chapter 1, Providence Church is structured around GCs (Gospel Communities). These smaller communities connect people to the life of our church, enabling them to grow in Christ in the context of real relationships and engage in the mission of the church together. Because GCs are in many ways a shepherding structure, our GC leaders have a crucial role in the church. It is imperative that they walk with God personally and have the ability to lead others spiritually. Therefore, it was our priority to begin preparing future GC leaders in these things. That was the aim of our initial participant list for Equip. Twelve people participated in Equip in 2017, six men and six women.

For 2018 and 2019, we asked our current GC leaders to give input on whom to invite into Equip. This enabled us to better identify emerging spiritual leaders across our entire church body by broadening our search beyond the immediate knowledge of the pastors. An email was sent out asking GC leaders to recommend people in their groups whom they saw as future GC leaders or as future ministry leaders in some other capacity.[1] From responses to that email, we compiled a list of 32 potential candidates for the 2018 Equip class. For 2019, we compiled a list of 43 potential candidates. We then chose a group of people from each of those lists that represented a broad cross-section of our GCs and emailed them an invitation to be a part of Equip.[2] Eighteen people accepted the invitation to participate in Equip in 2018, nine men and nine women. Fourteen people participated in 2019, seven men and seven women.

[1] See a sample of this email in Appendix A, p. 138.
[2] See a sample of this email in Appendix A, p. 139.

Description of Each Quarter

Quarter 1: Spiritual Disciplines

The first quarter consisted of eight meetings during the months of January, February, and March. Each meeting was held at the church office on Wednesday mornings from 6:30-8:00 AM. We began every meeting with a light breakfast and coffee then gathered in a living room area for discussion. At the first meeting everyone took time to introduce themselves, then I gave a quick explanation of what Equip is intended to be: It is not a class or a book study. It is a community of spiritual leaders exploring together what it means to walk with God, apply the gospel, and make disciples.

The focus of the first quarter was on walking with God through the practice of the spiritual disciplines. The book we read together was *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney. Whitney's book provided the framework for exploring the spiritual disciplines and it was the launching point for all of our group discussions. Whitney says that the purpose of the spiritual disciplines is to grow in godliness or in Christlikeness. He cites 1 Timothy 4:7 as the Bible verse that shapes the premise of his entire book: "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (NASB). If the end goal of the Christian life is godliness (which Whitney defines as both closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ)[3], then the spiritual disciplines are the means by which that goal is pursued.

[3] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 9.

The discussion guide for the eight meetings of Quarter 1 can be found in Appendix B on pages 141-147. Week 1 was an introduction to the spiritual disciplines and a discussion of chapter 1 of Whitney's book. Week 2 focused on chapters 2 and 3 of the book, which dealt with the discipline of Bible intake. We discussed what the Bible is, how it is structured, and why it is so important to our walk with God. The final twenty minutes of this meeting was spent practicing the discipline of Bible intake together by reading a passage of scripture, making observations about the passage, meditating upon it, and sharing how we might apply it. Week 3 was a discussion of the disciplines of prayer and worship, which are covered in chapters 4 and 5 of Whitney's book. We split into two groups for this conversation, because that better enabled us to do a prayer exercise together at the end of the meeting. Week 4 was a discussion of evangelism and serving, the two disciplines explored in chapters 6 and 7 of the book. These two disciplines are outward-focused, emphasizing living the gospel in both word and deed. For the final twenty minutes of this meeting, we each wrote down someone in our life we wanted to engage in spiritual conversation. Then we prayed for those people by name and prayed for opportunities to share the gospel with them. Week 5 was a discussion of chapter 8 on the spiritual discipline of stewardship. Most people do not think of stewardship as a spiritual discipline, but if we are going to use the gifts of time and money to God's glory, it will require discipline. Week 6 covered chapter 9 on the discipline of fasting and chapter 10 on the discipline of silence and solitude. These two disciplines are the most counter-cultural of all the disciplines we discussed and consequently they are probably the least practiced. We ended the meeting by spending ten minutes in silence. The fact that ten minutes felt like a long time to be completely

silent was an indicator that we live in a noisy culture and need to discipline ourselves to be quiet and listen to God. I also handed out the spiritual disciplines project[4] during this meeting. The participants would present what they planned to do for this project during the last meeting of the quarter. Week 7 was a conversation about chapters 11 and 12 from Whitney's book, the disciplines of journaling and learning. These practices are not typically mentioned on lists of spiritual disciplines, but they are actually quite important to consider. Learning gets at the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, because "disciple" simply means "learner." And journaling mirrors the scriptural practice of putting prayers, praises, and meditations in writing. During the last 15 minutes of this meeting, we took some time alone to write, seeking the Lord through journaling. Finally, week 8 was a brief conversation about chapter 13 from Whitney's book. Then each person took five minutes to present their spiritual disciplines project. We closed by praying for one another, that we might faithfully live out our projects during the rest of the year.

The practical project for this first quarter was called the "Spiritual Disciplines Project" (see Appendix C, p. 165). Each participant was to develop a personal spiritual disciplines plan that they would follow for the rest of the year. The guidelines for forming the plan were to (1) choose Bible intake and one other spiritual discipline from Whitney's book, (2) articulate a doable, realistic, and specific plan for both of these disciplines, and (3) think through how practicing these disciplines will contribute to growing in godliness. The goal for this project was for the Equip participants to develop new habits and rhythms in the spiritual disciplines over the course of the year, which would help them

[4] This was the practical project for the first quarter. It can be seen in Appendix C, p. 165.

grow in Christlikeness and commune with God as a way of life. In addition, each participant was to coordinate with two or three other members of Equip to meet a couple of times during the breaks between quarters for accountability and prayer. This would not only help them implement their spiritual disciplines plan in community, it would also create opportunities for building relationships outside of our scheduled meeting times.

Quarter 2: Spiritual Formation

The second quarter took place over six meetings during the months of May and June.[5] The emphasis of this quarter was on developing a more holistic understanding of how we are spiritually formed (or how we grow in Christlikeness). James K.A. Smith's *You Are What You Love* was the book we read together, which served as the guide for our weekly discussions. Smith's thesis is that human beings are primarily loving beings (defined and motivated by what we desire), and our regular habits and practices are what form our loves toward a particular end (or telos). He writes, "You can't not love. So, the question isn't *whether* you will love something as ultimate; the question is *what* you will love as ultimate."[6] As Christians, we want our ultimate love to be God and his kingdom. But what forms our desires toward his kingdom? Smith contends that it is not primarily the acquiring of information or knowledge, but rather it is participating in regular embodied practices and habits, which he calls liturgies. In fact, the subtitle of his book, *The Spiritual Power of Habit*, rounds out his thesis. If Smith's view is true, then it has major implications in how we grow as disciples and how we think about making

[5] We did seven meetings in 2018. The reason we reduced it to six meetings in 2019 was that the book (*You Are What You Love*) gets a bit repetitive, so combining some chapters in the book discussion was more effective.
[6] James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 10.

disciples. “This model [of the human person as a loving being] provides a framework for thinking about the task of discipleship, the nature of sanctification, and the role of worship.”[7] Our aim in the second quarter was to discuss this framework and explore how it applies to spiritual formation.

The discussion guide for the six meetings of Quarter 2 can be found in Appendix B on pages 147-153. On Week 1, we introduced Smith’s thesis and discussed chapter 1 of his book. A key component to this first conversation was talking about how our approach to discipleship and Christian formation might change if we saw ourselves as defined by what we desire rather than by what we know. Week 2 was a discussion of chapter 2 of *You Are What You Love*. The reality is that we might not love what we think we love because we are immersed in secular liturgies (love-shaping rituals) that are constantly forming and directing our loves. Smith says, “We unconsciously learn to love rival kingdoms because we don’t realize we’re participating in rival liturgies.”[8] As an exercise, we did a “liturgical analysis” of our social media practices by answering questions like: What are my regular practices or liturgies related to social media? What vision of the good life is carried in those liturgies? What do they implicitly teach me about myself, other people, and the world? What do they want me to love? I also handed out the spiritual formation project[9] at this meeting, which the participants would present in the final meeting of the quarter. Week 3 was a discussion of chapter 3 of the book on the importance of worship. If our rituals are what shape and orient our desires, then we need regular rituals that direct our desires toward God and his kingdom. This makes the

[7] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 10.
[8] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 37.
[9] This was the practical project for the second quarter. It can be seen in Appendix C, pp. 166-169.

regular gathered worship of the church crucial to our spiritual formation. In fact, Smith calls the church's worship "the heart of discipleship."[10] By this he means that all other aspects of our spiritual formation flow from and are nourished by our regular practice of worship. Week 4 was a conversation about chapter 4 of the book. We discussed the purpose of worship and the narrative sequence of historic Christian worship. It was fruitful to talk about the order of worship at Providence Church and how that liturgy aligns with the historic worship of the church. Specifically, we looked at how the elements of our worship service are a weekly retelling of the gospel story and how regular participation in the liturgy of worship counters secular liturgies that have deformed us. Week 5 was a discussion of chapters 5 and 6 of Smith's book. Chapter 5 focused on spiritual formation in the daily life of our homes. Household rituals, rhythms, and norms can unknowingly promote a love for the world rather than a love for God. So, we talked about doing a liturgical audit of our household routines and practices and how they are forming us. Chapter 6 helped us think through discipling the next generation in light of Smith's model. On Week 6, we split up into men's and women's groups and each person presented key takeaways from his or her spiritual formation project.

The practical project for Quarter 2 was called the "Spiritual Formation Project" (see Appendix C, pages 166-169). Essentially it is a personal liturgies inventory, a tool for each participant to thoughtfully take stock of their personal routines and habits. Given the reality that our loves are formed by our habits, many of which are second nature and un-evaluated, it is helpful to take an honest look at our lives and ask what our habits reveal about what we really love. Each participant was to spend several hours on the

[10] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 68.

project, seeking the Lord and others for wisdom. They wrote down their daily and weekly routines and habits as well as their monthly and annual routines. Then they asked questions like: What vision of the good life is carried in those liturgies? What kind of person do these practices want me to become? What do they want me to love? What are some desires I have in my life and in my walk with God, and how are my habits lining up with my desires? Finally, each participant recorded their main takeaways from doing this personal liturgy inventory and presented their discoveries to the rest of the group.

Quarter 3: Gospel Fluency

The third quarter focused on gospel fluency: What is the gospel and how does it work in our lives to bring about change? In preparation for this topic, the participants read Tim Keller's *The Prodigal God* during the extended break between the second and third quarters. This book offers an insightful look at the gospel through the lens of Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, giving a fresh take on lostness, sin, and salvation. This was good fodder for the group to consider as we approached the topic of gospel-centered change. Then the third quarter unfolded over seven meetings in July, August, and September. The book that served as the basis of our discussions was *You Can Change* by Tim Chester. In his introduction, Chester writes, "We're not changed by systems or rules. We need a Redeemer to set us free, and we have a great Redeemer in Jesus. This book points to Jesus and explains how faith in Jesus leads to change, what theologians call sanctification or becoming more like Jesus."[11] Our purpose for reading and discussing

[11] Tim Chester, *You Can Change: God's Transforming Power for Our Sinful Behavior and Negative Emotions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 9.

this book was to explore the gospel more deeply and learn to apply it to our lives. The practical project for this quarter was incorporated into the weekly reading. Each participant picked a specific area of sin or brokenness in their life where they wanted to see change. Then every chapter of the book concluded with a chance to work on a particular aspect of the change project, which we then discussed in our meetings.

The discussion guide for Quarter 3 can be found in Appendix B on pages 153-157. Week 1 gave us a chance to reconnect, hear how everyone's spiritual disciplines projects were going, and discuss *The Prodigal God*. On Week 2, we split into men's and women's groups so that we could more efficiently discuss chapters 1 and 2 of *You Can Change* and more intimately discuss our change projects. Each person shared the area where they would like to see change and what conformity to Jesus would look like in that area of their life. Then we discussed our motives for change. There are fleshly reasons for change, but the aim is to have gospel-centered motivations. Week 3 covered chapters 3 and 4 in the book with an emphasis on faulty approaches to change. Each person shared from their change project about when they struggle with their specific issue and what is going on in their hearts when they do. The first 15 minutes of the Week 4 meeting was spent teaching a gospel-centered change diagram to the entire group.[12] The diagram illustrates the overall process of gospel change, and I used my own change project as an example of how it works. After teaching the diagram, we split up into men's and women's groups to discuss chapter 5 of the book regarding the truths we need to turn to in our change projects. Week 5 emphasized chapter 6 in the book which addresses turning from heart idols or sinful desires. Week 6 was a discussion of chapters 7 and 8 in

[12] This diagram can be seen in Appendix B, p. 158. We call it the "Gospel Change Flow" diagram. It is attributed to one of our Providence members, Eric Haug.

the book. Related to our change projects, we talked about ways we either excuse, minimize, or hide our sin. Also, we discussed strategies to adopt that will reinforce faith and repentance. Finally, in Week 7 we stayed together as one large group to talk about chapters 9 and 10 of *You Can Change*. We ended by giving each person an opportunity to share personal takeaways from their change projects: What did they learn about themselves? What did they learn about the gospel? What new insights did they gain about how sanctification works? Then we spent a few minutes praying for one another as we seek to change into the likeness of Christ.

Quarter 4: Making Disciples

We finished the year with seven meetings during the months of October, November, and December. Having spent three quarters of the year focusing on walking with God through the spiritual disciplines, reforming our loves, and gospel application, the final quarter emphasized passing those things on to others. Our call as Christians is not just to walk with Jesus ourselves, but to make disciples of Jesus. The focus of the fourth quarter of Equip was on growing the participants in their conviction and confidence as disciple-makers. The guide for our meetings was Robert Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. This little book examines Jesus' strategy of evangelism by looking closely at the New Testament gospel accounts. The introduction of the book asks, "How do we go forward with an evangelism—a widening of the circle of faith so that it includes more and more people who have transformingly trusted Christ as Savior—that is

continuous, contagious, and compelling?"[13] Our goal in the fourth quarter of Equip was to explore that question.

The discussion guide for Quarter 4 meetings can be found in Appendix B on pages 158-164. We started the Week 1 meeting by touching base on how our spiritual disciplines projects and gospel change projects were going. Then we spent some time discussing Jesus' objectives for the church by looking at Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts 1:8. It was helpful to give everyone a chance to talk about where they feel inadequate, hesitant, fearful, or ill-equipped when it comes to making disciples of Jesus. Week 2 was a conversation about chapters 1 and 2 of *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, which cover the principles of selection and association in discipleship. Jesus selected a small group of disciples and then he spent intentional time with them. That small group spiritually multiplied into the lives of others and the mission of Jesus went forward to the ends of the earth. On Week 3, we discussed chapters 3 and 4 in the book, "Consecration" and "Impartation." Jesus called his disciples to follow him with their whole lives, to live a life consecrated to him. This has implications in how we call others into discipleship. Then Jesus imparted his life to his disciples, meaning he gave himself away. The group discussed what it would look like to follow his example in this. Week 4 focused on chapters 5 and 6, the importance of demonstration and delegation in discipleship. Jesus demonstrated to his disciples how to live by living in front of them. In the same way, most of us learn how to follow Christ by observing someone else's life and imitating them. We talked about how the Equip members currently felt about being a living example to others of how to follow Jesus. Jesus also delegated to his disciples, giving

[13] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1993), 11.

them assignments through which they would learn and grow and be a tangible expression of his mission to the world. Along those lines, we gave the Equip members an assignment to be done over the next couple of weeks: They were to initiate with someone in their life who is not a Christian. It could take any form they preferred (i.e. having a spiritual conversation, getting coffee with them, asking them about their spiritual beliefs, serving them in some way, etc.). In two weeks, we would share some of what happened as we took the initiative to move toward others in the power of the Holy Spirit. Week 5 completed our discussion of *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by looking at chapters 7 and 8 and the epilogue. This meeting was largely a discussion of Jesus' expectation that his disciples would bear fruit. Making disciples is a type of fruit-bearing. It is asking God to reproduce in others what he has done in our own life. This is why our own walks with Christ are so important, because we reproduce who we are. In order for people to know and follow Jesus, "they must have a mentor who will stand among them and say, 'Follow me, I know the way'."[14] Everything learned in Equip thus far was leading toward the goal of the Equip members becoming this kind of mentor to others. Week 6 was a basic evangelism training: How to clearly and simply share the gospel with another person. We brainstormed some of the things that we need to talk about when sharing the gospel. Things about God, things about humanity and sin, things about Jesus, and things about faith. Then I demonstrated a simple way of sharing the gospel using Romans 6:23. Week 7 was our final meeting together. I gave a charge to the group to see themselves as spiritual leaders in our church, to take personal ownership of God's mission through the church, and to proactively use their gifts to minister to others and make disciples. We

[14] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 100.

ended by getting in smaller groups so that each person could share what they were planning to do for their final practical project.

The practical project for Quarter 4 was called "The Multiplication Project" (see Appendix C, pages 170-171). The goal of the project was for each of the Equip members to pass on something they have learned about following Christ to one or two others. There were two options for the project. The first option was to select one or two Christians and invite them to explore what it means to walk more closely with Jesus. The invitation would be to meet regularly for three to six months and go through either *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* or *You Can Change*, as well as do the corresponding practical project together. Besides going through the content, this time would be focused on building meaningful discipleship relationships by seeking to incorporate some of the principles from *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. The second option was to select one or two people who are not yet Christians and invite them to explore the question "who is Jesus?" by reading and discussing the Gospel of John together. Ideally, they would commit to meet regularly for three to six months. During that time, they would read through John together and discuss one chapter each meeting (Some suggested questions for chapter discussions: Who does Jesus say he is? Who do others say he is? What issue relevant to my life is Jesus addressing? How does he address it? What do I believe about Jesus?). Also important to this option was looking for ways to build relationships with these non-Christian friends outside of the official meeting times.

This project was aimed at giving each Equip member some practical experience in basic discipleship, boosting their confidence to pass on what they know about Jesus in very simple ways. The project was also aimed at growing their heart for making disciples.

Our hope is that Equip members would have a compassion for people, a competence for ministry, and a conviction for participating in Jesus' mission in the world.

Program Evaluation

I stated in Chapter One that the goal of this thesis project is to evaluate whether or not the Equip program actually produces leaders who are more equipped for gospel-centered leadership. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of Equip, I utilized self-assessments from the participants. These self-assessments were designed to help gauge growth in the lives of the participants as it related to the overall program objectives.

2018 and 2019 Self-Assessments

For the 2018 and 2019 Equip classes, each participant filled out a self-assessment questionnaire at the beginning of the program in January.[15] The questionnaire has both qualitative and quantitative elements. It seeks to provide a current snapshot of the participants' lives in terms of the equipping objectives, a snapshot that is both subjective (capturing what they feel) and objective (capturing what they do and know). The questionnaire gathers information on things like the participants' understanding of the spiritual disciplines, their current practice of the spiritual disciplines, their view of important factors in spiritual formation, their understanding of the gospel and how to apply it to real-life issues, their confidence in sharing the gospel, their confidence in leading others spiritually, and their personal convictions and practices related to making disciples. The self-assessment contains fifteen questions, seven that are short answer and

[15] The self-assessment questionnaire can be seen in Appendix D, pp. 172-173. The participants filled it out on a Google Form.

eight that provide a Likert scale for the answer. Three of the questions correspond to Quarter 1 material, two questions to Quarter 2, three questions to Quarter 3, four questions to Quarter 4, and three questions relate to overall readiness for spiritual leadership. Each participant was given a randomly assigned number to use for identification on the self-assessment. This was to ensure that their answers were anonymous to me, thereby encouraging honesty in their answers and minimizing factors that might influence my evaluation of the data. At the end of the Equip program in December, each participant filled out the self-assessment questionnaire again. In doing so, they were instructed not to look back at their answers from the Pre-Equip self-assessment. I emphasized to them that I wanted to know what they think, feel, and know right now, not allowing past thoughts to skew their answers. By comparing their answers from the Pre-Equip assessment with their answers from the Post-Equip assessment (using their randomly assigned number for identification), my hope was to see growth and progress in their lives in terms of the overall equipping objectives.

Self-Assessment from 2017 Equip Class

There was one other self-assessment tool that I used to help evaluate the effectiveness of Equip. I asked the original twelve participants from the 2017 pilot equipping program to fill out a self-assessment questionnaire nine months after they had gone through the program.[16] The aim of this assessment was to determine if Equip had made any difference in their life almost a year after completing the program. I wanted to know if they had seen any lasting changes in their perspective and practices. There are

[16] This self-assessment questionnaire can be seen in Appendix D, pp. 174-176. The participants filled it out on a Google Form.

seventeen questions on this self-assessment which cover the range of equipping objectives we were pursuing. The first ten questions provide a Likert scale for an answer, and the final seven questions are short answer. Each participant was given a randomly assigned number for identification, which provided anonymity for their answers. They were encouraged to answer as honestly as possible. I told them that the assessment would only be helpful to my research if they answered with what they really thought, what they really knew, and what their practices really were at the time of filling out the questionnaire. My hope in evaluating their answers was to see a measurable difference in their lives because of their participation in Equip.

Conclusion

Evaluating Equip using the self-assessments of the participants will lead me to an exploration of the overall effectiveness of the program. Is the program accomplishing what we set out to accomplish, which is to equip young leaders with basic core competencies necessary for gospel-centered spiritual leadership? What do we need to improve or do differently? Are there any obvious gaps in this program? What are the next steps for leadership development in our church, specifically in terms of topics or competencies for the ongoing equipping of our spiritual leaders? Chapter 5 will look at the outcomes of the project, focusing on the results from my program evaluation and what was learned from those results.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES

The real test of any equipping program is whether or not the participants are actually equipped by the program. If the equipping objectives do not begin to manifest in the real lives of the people, then the program is at best an academic exercise or at worst a waste of time. I relied on self-assessments of the participants to evaluate whether or not the program led to any changes in their lives. The 2018 and 2019 participants filled out an identical self-assessment at the beginning of the program and then again at the end of the program. I then compared their answers from the Pre-Equip assessment and the Post-Equip assessment to see if they experienced any growth in terms of the overall equipping objectives. The 2017 participants filled out a self-assessment nine months after they had gone through Equip. Their answers gave an indication of whether or not Equip had brought about longer-lasting changes in their perspectives and practices.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the outcomes of the thesis project. The chapter is broken down into three parts: (1) What was learned from comparing the Pre-Equip and Post-Equip self-assessments from 2018 and 2019; (2) What was learned from the 2017 self-assessments; (3) Conclusions and next steps.

2018 and 2019 Self-Assessments

In 2018 and 2019, I asked an associate of mine to email the Equip participants a link to the assessment and to assign each participant a number with which to identify themselves. This number was to ensure anonymity in their answers. The participants used

their identification number on both the Pre-Equip and Post-Equip assessments, which enabled me to easily compare their answers from the beginning of the year and the end of the year. There were 23 respondents out of a total of 32 Equip participants who filled out both the Pre-Equip assessment and the Post-Equip assessment.[1] What follows is an evaluation of any changes and growth in these 23 people that could be observed from comparing their answers on the two self-assessments. There were fifteen questions on the assessment. My analysis will break the data down by looking at the questions that correspond to each quarter of Equip, ending with the questions that relate to overall readiness for spiritual leadership.

Quarter 1: Three Questions

Question 1 was a Likert scale question: "How would you rate your familiarity with all of the different spiritual disciplines that God has given us to help us grow in Christ (1 being unfamiliar and 5 being very familiar)?" This question was aimed at measuring the participants' general understanding of the spiritual disciplines going into Equip and then again coming out of it. Seventeen respondents (74%) indicated an increase in their familiarity with the spiritual disciplines after going through Equip. Six respondents (26%) indicated no change. The average increase in the participants' familiarity with the spiritual disciplines was 1.43 points on a 5-point scale. It is not surprising that there was an overall increase, given that the entire first quarter of Equip was devoted to the explanation, discussion, and practice of the different spiritual

[1] A total of nine assessments were unusable: Six respondents only gave answers for either the Pre-Equip assessment or the Post-Equip assessment. Three of the 2018 respondents identified themselves using the same identification number, making it impossible to know which person was which. So, their assessments had to be removed from the data.

disciplines. I was actually surprised that six of the respondents did not indicate any growth in this area. It is feasible that many of the participants had a good understanding of the spiritual disciplines before going through Equip, since we talk about the spiritual disciplines often in our church. However, Whitney's book introduced some disciplines that are less common, so I expected growth in all the participants on this question.

Question 2: "How often do you personally spend time with God through one or more of the spiritual disciplines (1 being never, 2 being rarely, 3 being 2-3 days per week, 4 being 4-5 days per week, and 5 being almost every day)?" This question was quantitative in nature, revealing the actual practices of the participants. After going through the Equip program, twelve respondents (52%) indicated an increase in the number of days per week they spent time with God through the spiritual disciplines. Two respondents (9%) indicated a decrease. Nine (39%) indicated no change. The average increase in the participants' weekly practice of the spiritual disciplines was 0.61 points on a 5-point scale. I did expect an increase here, because the practical project for Quarter 1 was for the participants to implement and follow a spiritual disciplines plan for the whole year. What I did not expect was for only 52% of the people to show an increase. One factor leading to this lower-than-anticipated number may have been that some of the participants started strong on their spiritual disciplines plan but then tapered off as the year went along. This was confirmed in conversations with many of the participants.

Question 3: "Give your response to the following statement: I feel 'at home' in the Bible and I can immediately point to specific and current things God is teaching me there (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)." This question was an attempt to gauge two things: The participants' overall comfortability with the Bible and

how recent/consistent their personal engagement with the Bible was. Comparing the Post-Equip assessments with the Pre-Equip assessments, fifteen respondents (65%) indicated an increase in feeling at home in the Bible and regularly learning from God there. Eight respondents (35%) indicated no change after going through Equip. The average increase was 0.87 points on a 5-point scale. The content of Equip was not specifically aimed at helping the participants more thoroughly understand the Bible as a whole. However, it was aimed at helping them to more regularly spend time in the Bible. So, it was good to hear that, by year's end, a majority of the people were reading the Bible more, feeling more comfortable there, and personally hearing from God there.

The stated objective for Quarter 1 of Equip was that the participants would grow in their commitment to personally walk with God through regular engagement in the spiritual disciplines. It is fair to conclude from evaluating these three self-assessment questions that the Equip program led to a general increase in the participants' familiarity with the spiritual disciplines and their practice of them. Over half of these young leaders were spending more regular time with God after going through the program. Our prayer is that God would continue to grow their thirst for him and their consistency in the means of grace he has given to encounter him.

Quarter 2: Two Questions

Question 4: "What would you say are a few of the most important factors in growing a person's love for Jesus and his kingdom?" The most common answers to this question were knowing the Bible, prayer, serving others, and community. There were three notable areas of growth or change in the Post-Equip assessment answers: First,

several respondents added corporate worship as an important factor in growing a person's love for Jesus. This is encouraging, because one of the key formative practices discussed in Quarter 2 was participating in gathered worship. Second, a number of the respondents grew in their articulation of heart awareness (knowing the heart's affections and idols) as an important factor in growing to love Jesus. One of them said, "A person will grow in their love [for Jesus] way more if they are seeing what other things their heart loves more than Christ and they know how to repent of that and ask for him to change their hearts."[2] Another person talked about growing in the love of Jesus through practicing the spiritual disciplines until they become muscle memory.[3] This thought reinforces one of the main points of Quarter 2, which is that our practices shape our affections. A third area of change that I saw in the Post-Equip answers to this question was an emphasis on making disciples and sharing the gospel as one of the factors that grows our love for Jesus and his kingdom. This is undoubtedly the content of Quarter 4 influencing their answers, which indicates that the participants were incorporating the Equip content into their lives more holistically. In fact, one participant's response to this question demonstrated that they had absorbed the heart of the entire Equip program: "To hear the gospel, learn the gospel, and love the gospel. The more I hear the gospel and share it with others, the more I love Jesus. I want others to experience the same."[4]

Question 5: "If someone asked you why regularly worshipping with the church on Sundays is important to their spiritual growth, what would you tell them?" The most common answers to this question were that growth happens in community, that worship

[2] 2019 Respondent #13, Post-Equip self-assessment, question 4.
[3] 2018 Respondent #18, Post-Equip self-assessment, question 4.
[4] 2019 Respondent #8, Post-Equip self-assessment, question 4.

focuses our attention on God and others, that our habits and routines form us, and that corporate worship is a way of submitting our lives to others and to the leadership of the church. Most of the respondents did not show significant change between their Pre-Equip answers and their Post-Equip answers. However, one common theme in those that did show change was the idea that worship recalibrates our hearts toward God and his kingdom. This indicates some growth in their understanding of the formative nature of worship. One respondent said, "We are liturgical beings. What we do as a part of our daily practices shape our loves. More importantly, Sunday gatherings shape our loves as the body towards Jesus."[5] This idea was not present at all in their Pre-Equip answer.

The stated objective of Quarter 2 was that Equip participants would develop a broader view of spiritual formation by considering how our practices shape our loves. Much of the language used by the respondents on the Post-Equip assessment shows that they had at least become familiar with this aspect of spiritual formation. Terms like "heart affections" and "practices shaping our loves" and "liturgical beings" were not found in the Pre-Equip assessments, but were scattered throughout the Post assessments. These were new ideas to most participants, so it will take more than one equipping class to work them into their lives. But the self-assessments show the ideas have taken root.

Quarter 3: Three Questions

Question 9: "You are talking with a friend in the church who is struggling with sinful anger in their personal relationships. In a few sentences, how would you help them apply the gospel to this particular area of sin? In other words, how would you give them

[5] 2018 Respondent #5, Post-Equip self-assessment, question 5.

good news and not just good advice?" The third quarter was focused on gospel fluency, and this question was aimed at revealing the participants' ability to apply the gospel to a specific area of sin. Comparing their Pre-Equip answers with their Post-Equip answers would hopefully show growth in this ability. One trend I noticed in many Post-Equip answers was that their counsel to their hypothetical angry friend went from addressing how the friend should relate to others (i.e. forgive them, pray for them, be gracious to them) to focusing on how the friend should look within their own heart to the root of the anger and turn to Jesus there. This attempt to get at the root of the sin reflects our discussions of the book *You Can Change*, along with the practical change project from Quarter 3. One respondent's Post-Equip answer seemed especially influenced by *You Can Change*: "I'd want to dig a little deeper into what is making the person angry. Are they idolizing control? Respect? Comfort? Are these idols fueled by a skewed or incomplete picture of who God is, what he's done for us, and who we are to him?"[6] I was generally encouraged by the overall gospel-centeredness in both the Pre-Equip and Post-Equip answers of many of the participants. That is, they spoke of the fact that God relates to us in grace, and we should relate to others in grace. They spoke of how Jesus died to secure all the things our anger is fighting for (such as control, approval, or respect). Finally, several respondents spoke of Jesus as both our example and our enabler when it comes to responding righteously to our anger.

Question 10: "How would you assess your self-awareness of particular sins and heart idols in your life and how they commonly manifest (1 being unaware, I likely have significant blind spots and 5 being keenly aware, I can articulate these things)?" This

[6] 2018 Respondent #18, Post-Equip self-assessment, question 9.

question was designed to determine the extent to which participants think about their sin in terms of misplaced worship and wrong affections, getting at its roots and not just its fruits. Eleven respondents (48%) indicated an increase in self-awareness of particular sins and heart idols after going through Equip. One respondent (4%) indicated a decrease in self-awareness. Eleven respondents (48%) indicated no change. The average increase was 0.70 points on a 5-point scale. I would have liked to have seen more people increase in their self-awareness of the roots of their sin, especially after taking seven weeks to talk about gospel-centered change in their actual lives. On the other hand, our church has a strong culture of talking about sin honestly, identifying heart idols, and pursuing repentance. So, it is possible that many of the participants had been thoughtful and honest about their sin before doing Equip and therefore did not have any new revelations about these things.

Question 11: "The gospel not only provides the means for forgiveness, but also the means for real change in our actual lives. In a few sentences, how does the gospel work in our lives to change us?" There were a number of elements that showed up repeatedly in the different answers to this question: (1) I am in union with Christ, so the Holy Spirit is in me, bearing fruit and giving me the power to change. (2) Jesus died to secure my approval, acceptance, satisfaction, and status. So, I can live out of that instead of seeking those things on my own. (3) I am a new creation in Christ. He frees me from the power of sin, so change is possible. (4) The gospel gives me a real hope to live for, so I don't have to live for the fleeting things of this world. This question was not particularly helpful in terms of showing real growth or change in the respondents. The answers on the Pre-Equip assessment suggest that most of the participants already had a fairly strong

grasp of how the gospel works in our lives to change us. This is encouraging in one sense, because it indicates that they have been hearing the gospel and its implications preached regularly in our church.

The stated objective of Quarter 3 was that Equip participants would grow in gospel fluency by learning to apply the gospel to specific areas of sin and brokenness. What became clear from looking at the Pre-Equip self-assessments was that a high number of the participants had good gospel fluency before going through Equip. This is not a surprise, because the mission of Providence Church is to help people to believe and apply the gospel in every area of life. We talk about the gospel all the time and seek to apply it to our actual lives. So, the Pre-Equip answers give affirmation that these things are shaping the culture of our church and taking root in the lives of our members. One area of growth that was evident in the Post-Equip assessments was the participants' ability to talk about the roots of sin and to articulate how Jesus changes us at the deepest part of who we are.

Quarter 4: Four Questions

Question 6: "How would you summarize the gospel in one sentence?" The most common elements included in the answers to this question were: (1) The perfect life of Jesus (2) Sin, which separates us from God (3) The substitutionary death of Jesus for our sins, which reconciles us to God (4) The resurrection of Jesus. Five respondents showed growth in their answers by being more explicit about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in their Post-Equip assessment answer. Three respondents regressed in their answers by failing to talk about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in their Post-

Equip assessment answer. Two respondents incorporated Romans 6:23 into their Post-Equip assessment answer, which indicates that they learned from the evangelism equipping time about how to concisely summarize the gospel.

Question 7: "How confident do you feel sharing the gospel with someone who is not yet a Christian (1 being not confident at all and 5 being very confident)?" After going through Equip, fourteen respondents (61%) indicated an increase in their confidence in sharing the gospel with someone who is not yet a Christian. Nine respondents (39%) indicated no change in their confidence level. The average increase in the participants' level of confidence in sharing the gospel was 0.91 points on a 5-point scale.[7] I am thankful that participation in Equip led to an overall increase in these leaders' confidence to talk about the gospel. Evangelism training was a relatively minimal part of Quarter 4, so it is understandable that not everyone grew in their comfortability with sharing Christ. However, the gospel and its implications were explored throughout the entire Equip program, which obviously led to a greater sense of self-assurance in talking about the gospel with others.

Question 8: "How often do you have spiritual conversations with others (1 being never and 5 being often)?" This question was deliberately worded in an open-ended way. It does not define whether or not the spiritual conversations are with Christians or non-Christians. It does not suggest specific frequencies for the conversations such as weekly, daily, or more than once a day. It does not define the content of the conversations. The purpose of the question was to evaluate whether or not conversations about spiritual things had become a more normal part of the participants' lives after they had gone

[7] Due to an error, this question was put on a 7-point scale for 2019. Therefore, the 2019 scores were adjusted down by one unit in order to have greater continuity with the 2018 scores.

through Equip. Twelve respondents (52%) indicated an increase in their frequency of spiritual conversations with others after going through the Equip program. Three respondents (13%) indicated a decrease. Eight respondents (35%) indicated no change. The average increase of the participants' frequency of spiritual conversations was 0.57 points on a 5-point scale. Because the content of Equip was geared toward the participants becoming more attuned to God and his work in their lives, it is not unexpected that they would engage in spiritual conversations more regularly post Equip. We tend to talk about the things we are thinking about and learning. I was frankly a bit surprised that only a little over half of the respondents said they were talking about spiritual things more after going through Equip.

Question 15: "In your own words, what is the Great Commission and how do you see your role in it?" Most of the respondents included making disciples and sharing the gospel as key elements of the Great Commission. Largely this question did not show much change between the Pre-Equip and Post-Equip answers in terms of how the respondents understood the Great Commission and their role in it. However, I was encouraged that almost all of them saw themselves as personally called to play a role in making disciples. After going through Equip, a few of the respondents (6 out of 23) were more specific and focused in how they saw their role of making disciples. The most compelling answer to this question was by a member of the 2018 class in their Pre-Equip assessment: "I've always imagined my role as a gentle, long-term missionary to those around me, trying to love them the way God loved me…I see myself as a 'stayer,' someone who feels the need of Jesus exactly where I am…in my neighborhood, in my

work, and in the long-term relationships in my day to day life."[8] Their Post-Equip answer also conveyed this same conviction to be a constant presence in the lives of their non-believing friends and family members and to share the gospel as a way of life.

The stated objective of Quarter 4 was that Equip participants would be strengthened in their conviction to make disciples of Jesus (i.e. spiritually multiply) and would grow in their confidence to do so. Overall, the participants seemed to have grown in their ability to articulate the gospel and their comfortability in sharing it with others. More than half of the participants were having more frequent spiritual conversations after going through Equip than they were before. In general, participating in Equip fortified their conviction that the gospel had been entrusted to them and that they were called to pass it on to others. Even though most of them were taking the Great Commission seriously before going through Equip, the program gave them greater confidence that they could personally make disciples of Jesus.

Overall Readiness for Spiritual Leadership: Three Questions

Question 12: "How confident do you feel in your ability to lead others spiritually in either small-group or one-on-one contexts (1 being not confident and 5 being very confident)?" After going through Equip, fifteen respondents (65%) indicated an increase in their confidence to lead others spiritually. One respondent (4%) indicated a decrease in confidence. Seven respondents (31%) indicated no change. The average increase in confidence to lead others spiritually was 0.74 points on a 5-point scale. It is significant that the equipping program produced an overall increase in the participants' confidence to

[8] 2018 Respondent #11, Pre-Equip self-assessment, question 15.

lead spiritually, because the aim of the program was to prepare people for gospel-centered leadership. Part of that preparation was instilling them with a sense of confidence that they can do it, which will hopefully result in them taking steps toward spiritual leadership.

Question 13: "What factors most affect your confidence or lack of confidence in leading others spiritually?" This question was not especially helpful in showing growth or change in the respondents. However, there were two common answers that were revealing. Nearly half of the respondents said that lack of experience was a factor that diminished their confidence to lead spiritually. This lack of experience is understandable given that most of the participants were relatively young. Similarly, nearly half of the respondents cited lack of biblical knowledge as a factor that impacted their confidence in leading spiritually. This provided helpful insight into potential aims for future equipping classes. If lack of biblical knowledge is contributing to our people being hesitant to lead spiritually, then we need to consider offering equipping in that area. Covering topics like how the Bible is structured, where different books fit in the overall storyline of the Bible, and how to study and interpret the Bible would go a long way in increasing confidence in biblical knowledge.

Question 14: "How comfortable would you feel telling a younger Christian, 'Follow me as I follow Christ' (1 being very uncomfortable and 5 being very comfortable)?" After completing Equip, seventeen of the respondents (74%) indicated an increase in their comfort level in telling a younger Christian to follow them as they follow Christ. Six respondents (26%) indicated no change. The average increase was 1.22 points on a 5-point scale. This is evidence that the 2018 and 2019 Equip participants had

grown in their overall readiness for spiritual leadership, both in terms of confidence and competence. Participating in Equip not only helped them learn more about how to follow Christ personally, it also grew their confidence to be a model to others.

2017 Self-Assessments

Nine months after the 2017 participants had completed Equip, they were asked to fill out a self-assessment which would help evaluate if Equip had produced any longer-lasting changes in their perspectives and practices. An associate of mine emailed the participants a link to the assessment. He also assigned each of them a number with which to identify themselves.[9] Eleven out of the twelve 2017 participants filled out the seventeen-question assessment. Their answers helped in discerning whether or not there was any measurable difference in their lives nine months after Equip. A brief summary of their answers to each question is given below, along with observations about what those answers indicate.

Question 1: "Nine months later, I still find the content from Equip shaping my thinking—i.e. how I think about my walk with God, the gospel, my ministry to others, or my role in the church (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)." All of the respondents but one said that the content of Equip was still shaping their thinking nine months later (and the one respondent answered neutrally with a 3). Seven respondents (64%) strongly agreed, answering with a 5. Three respondents (27%) answered with a 4. The average response was 4.55 on a 5-point scale, indicating that Equip had a strong overall impact on the thinking of the participants.

[9] The number assigned to each participant was unknown to me, thus providing anonymity for their answers.

Question 2: “Nine months later, I find that Equip has made a practical difference in my life—i.e. a difference in my practices, habits, conversations, ministry to others, etc. (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree).” This question differed from the first question in that it asked the participants to evaluate their practices, not just their mindset. Every respondent but one (who answered neutrally with a 3) said that Equip was still impacting their practices, habits, conversations, and ministry to others. Seven respondents (64%) answered with a 5, and three respondents (27%) answered with a 4. The average response was 4.55 on a 5-point scale, meaning that Equip had made a noticeable difference in the regular practices of the participants. The next two questions focused on a specific practice, the spiritual disciplines.

Question 3: “I am more consistent in practicing the spiritual disciplines since going through Equip (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree).” Nine respondents (82%) said they are more consistent in practicing the spiritual disciplines since going through Equip, meaning they answered with a 4 or 5. Two respondents (18%) were neutral on the matter, answering with a 3. Because one of the objectives of Equip was for participants to grow in their commitment to walking with God through the spiritual disciplines, the responses to this question are highly encouraging. It means that these young leaders were not merely “checking the spiritual disciplines box” just to fulfill a class requirement, but that their lives had changed in a real way after the class was over. But to what extent? The next question attempted to quantify their spiritual practices.

Question 4: “How often do you personally spend time with God through one or more of the spiritual disciplines (1 being never, 2 being rarely, 3 being 2-3 days a week, 4 being 4-5 days a week, and 5 being almost every day)?” Four of the respondents (36.4%)

said that they spend time with God through the spiritual disciplines almost every day and four other respondents (36.4%) said they do so 4-5 days a week. Two respondents (18.2%) said they engage in the spiritual disciplines 2-3 days a week. Only one respondent (9%) said they rarely spend time with God through the spiritual disciplines. According to this data, the vast majority of those who have gone through Equip are consistently seeking to grow in Christlikeness through the spiritual disciplines. Nine months after Equip, 73% of the participants were still spending time with God four or more days a week. These practices had formed into holy habits, and they now have promise for even greater longevity.

Question 5: "I now find myself more consciously paying attention to how my habits and routines are shaping my loves (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)." This question was aimed at whether or not the content of Quarter 2 had a lasting impact, specifically the thesis of *You Are What You Love*. Nine of the eleven respondents said that they were now more consciously paying attention to how their habits and routines shape their loves (45.5% of the participants answered with a 4 and 36.4% answered with a 5). Two respondents (18.2%) indicated that they are not necessarily paying more close attention to the link between their habits and their affections. The average response was 4 on a 5-point scale. This means that the majority of Equip participants had become more cognizant of the formative nature of habits, routines, and rituals. This has positive implications for ongoing spiritual formation in their lives.

Question 6: "I now feel more confident to lead others spiritually than I did before going through Equip (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)." The answers to this question are crucial, because the main goal of Equip was to prepare

people to lead others spiritually. If the participants did not end up feeling more confident to do so, then we have missed on that goal. Happily, all of the respondents expressed greater confidence to lead others spiritually after going through Equip. Four respondents (36.4%) answered with a 5, and seven respondents (63.6%) answered with a 4. The average response was 4.36 on a 5-point scale.

Question 7: "I now feel more confident in talking about the gospel than I did before going through Equip (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)." This question differs from the previous question in that it is more narrowly focused on the participants' comfortability with the content of the gospel rather than their comfortability with general spiritual leadership. Eight respondents (72.7%) said they feel more confident talking about the gospel than they did before going through Equip (seven people answering with a 4 and one person answering with a 5). Three respondents (27.3%) were neutral on the matter. The average response was 3.82 on a 5-point scale. Although I am thankful that the Equip participants generally grew in confidence related to the gospel, I would like to have seen higher numbers here. It indicates that future Equip classes should incorporate more training in how to share the gospel. Greater competence in articulating what the gospel is will lead to greater confidence to do so.

Question 8: "I feel called to make disciples and I feel equipped to do so (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)." Ten respondents said they feel called to make disciples and feel equipped to do so (five people answering with a 4 and five people answering with a 5). Only one respondent was neutral, answering with a 3. The average response was 4.36 on a 5 -point scale. If the church is going to live into Jesus' calling to make disciples, then the members of the church need to be equipped to do so and they

must feel a personal responsibility for that calling. Based on the answers to this question, the Equip program successfully helped to prepare these people with the conviction and the competencies necessary to make disciples of Jesus.

Question 9: "I feel more ownership of Providence Church than I did before going through Equip (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)." Our goal was not simply to prepare people to lead spiritually in a general sense, but to prepare them to lead spiritually within the context of our particular church. Nine of the eleven respondents said they feel more ownership of Providence Church after going through Equip. One respondent indicated that they do not feel more ownership of Providence after going through Equip and one respondent was neutral on the matter. The average response was 4.45 on a 5-point scale, with 72.7% of the respondents answering with a 5. Any program that contributes to nearly three quarters of the participants professing a strong sense of ownership of our church's mission would be considered beneficial by our staff and elders. Every pastor wants to see church members taking more responsibility for the life of the church. The fact that these Equip participants now see themselves as leaders with a personal stake in the health of our church is a big win for Equip!

Question 10: "I am currently leading others spiritually or discipling someone (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)." Ten respondents said they are currently leading others spiritually or discipling someone. One respondent answered neutrally with a 3. The average response was 4.55 on a 5-point scale. The main takeaway here is that, nine months after going through Equip, over 90% of the participants were actively involved in leading others spiritually. This means that they were putting into practice the very things they had learned through Equip.

Question 11: "What (if anything) from Equip has stuck with you the most and why?" The most common answers to this question related to practicing the spiritual disciplines and thinking about how our habits shape our loves. It seems that the participants were all taking their own spiritual formation more seriously since Equip and had become convinced about the significance of routine practices in that formation. A few respondents said that the importance of repentance and faith in gospel change had stuck with them, specifically referencing the Gospel Change Flow Diagram (see Appendix B, p. 158) as being helpful. Two people said the call to make disciples and shepherd others had made a lasting imprint on them. It was refreshing to see Equip participants continuing to wrestle with how to better take responsibility for their own spiritual life and for the spiritual well-being of others. Said one respondent, "It has been almost 22 months since I started the Equip class. How have I used that time? Have I been cultivating a spiritually healthy life? Who am I pouring into? What seeds am I sowing and planting today for the kingdom?"[10]

Question 12: How has that changed your practices (if at all)? In other words, have the things that have stuck in your mind from Equip made any practical difference in your life? The most common answers to this question related to two practices: The spiritual disciplines and gospel application. A few people noted that they were now practicing the spiritual disciplines as a means of grace and growth rather than as an item on their to do list. A number of others said they had been applying the Gospel Change Flow Diagram. "I am quicker to recognize fruits of the flesh…but rather than jump to the fruits of the

[10] 2017 Respondent #11, self-assessment question 11.

Spirit I desire, the practice of identifying lies and idols in my heart, repenting in faith, and being led to worship Christ for who he is has been changing me over the last year."[11]

Question 13: "Have you passed on anything you learned from Equip to others? If so, what have you passed on and in what context?" The most frequent reply to this question was the book on the spiritual disciplines. Four people indicated that they were leading someone else through the book. "I have been meeting every two weeks with a coworker to go through the book on spiritual disciplines. We have chosen a couple of them to pursue and are meeting to discuss progress. I feel more comfortable leading the discussion than I would have in the past."[12] Notable from this response is the fact that the person is not only passing on what they have learned, but that they feel more confident and equipped in doing so. The second most common thing that participants said they were passing on to others was the Gospel Change Flow Diagram. It is fascinating how this fifteen-minute segment of Equip really stuck with people. They are applying it to their lives and sharing it with others. I think it is because it gives a simple summary of all that we talked about in Quarter 3 related to how gospel change works.

Question 14: "How would you summarize the gospel in one sentence?" The encouraging thing is that almost every respondent summarized the gospel by speaking of God reconciling and redeeming sinners through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. One person included the redemption of all things as part of Christ's work. I do wish more people had emphasized this aspect of the gospel. Future equipping likely needs to include a discussion of this aspect in order to help people broaden their understanding of the

[11] 2017 Respondent #9, self-assessment question 12.
[12] 2017 Respondent #11, self-assessment question 13.

gospel. That is, Christ did not come to just redeem individual sinners. He came to redeem the whole creation. Nearly all of the 2017 Equip participants answered this question with a one-sentence summary of the gospel that was clear, concise, and accurate. This indicates that they had been effectively equipped in being able to simply explain the content of the gospel.

Question 15: "You are talking with a friend in the church who is struggling with sinful anger. In a few sentences, how would you help them apply the gospel to this particular area of sin?" Seven of the eleven respondents said they would try to help their friend get to the root of the anger (idols, lies, sin beneath the sin). Seven respondents also specifically mentioned that they would want to talk to their friend about how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus addresses the root of the sin. One person said they would talk about the indwelling Holy Spirit as the power for change. One person said they would walk their friend through the Gospel Change Flow Diagram to help them get at the root of the sin. Based on these replies, the Quarter 3 content was still having an impact nine months after Equip was completed. Almost everyone still had a solid grasp on how to apply the gospel to a specific area of sin.

Question 16: "In your own words, what is the Great Commission and how do you see your role in it?" Nine of the eleven respondents said that the Great Commission is to go and make disciples of Jesus, and all of the respondents see that the Great Commission is meant for them! Three people mentioned very specific ways they were currently ministering and involved in the Great Commission. For example, one person said, "I'm building relationships with my neighbors with a view toward making disciples. I have also taken one of the members of my Gospel Community under my wing and am

discipling that person."[13] Another wrote, "I am working in apartment ministry, sharing the gospel with neighbors. I have used skills from Equip in this ministry."[14] It was refreshing to see that all of the Equip participants were heeding the call to make disciples of Jesus and were looking for specific opportunities to do so.

Question 17: "Where do you feel the need for more equipping as it relates to making disciples or leading spiritually (i.e. what are your "gaps")?" The most repeated answer to this question was the need for more equipping in Bible-fluency, so that they might grow in general knowledge of the scriptures. Another common answer was the desire for more equipping in sharing the gospel. Others saw a need to be trained in general small group leadership skills, such as leading a discussion, conflict resolution, caring and connecting, and leading through listening. Several respondents mentioned the need for greater accountability in applying what they were learning, both during the Equip year and in the year that follows. Perhaps this kind of ongoing accountability would help people build the things they were learning into habits and liturgies that would last a lifetime.

The final part of this chapter will summarize what was learned from implementing this project, assessing whether or not Equip is accomplishing what we set out to accomplish. Both the strengths and weaknesses of the program will be reviewed. Based on these outcomes, I will also suggest potential next steps for equipping spiritual leaders in our church and discuss how this equipping program might be transferable to other churches or other formats.

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[13] 2017 Respondent #6, self-assessment question 16.
[14] 2017 Respondent #7, self-assessment question 16.

Conclusions and Next Steps

My thesis has been that we can effectively equip young leaders with the basic core competencies necessary for gospel-centered leadership through a one-year mentored cohort designed around four training emphases, with a focus on reading, interaction, practical projects, and relationships. Equip was the program used to test this thesis, and on the whole, the program accomplished the objectives we established for it. There were many strengths to the program, not only in terms of content but also in terms of format and culture. However, there were also a few weaknesses, things that could be improved or done differently.

Strengths of the Program

Broadly speaking, an equipped spiritual leader is someone who walks with God and makes disciples of Jesus. In other words, they are personally growing in Christ and helping others do the same. The major strengths of the Equip program were in its preparation of young leaders to do these very things. For example, Equip led to the majority of participants becoming more consistent in their practice of the spiritual disciplines.[15] It also grew them in an understanding of how their habits and routines are spiritually formative, shaping their affections toward certain ends. In particular, the regular rhythm of corporate worship has stuck with many of the participants as being a vital aspect of a person's spiritual formation. The emphasis on gospel fluency was another strength of Equip. Participants grew in their ability to identify the roots of sin in

[15] Question 2 of the 2018-2019 self-assessments revealed that, after going through Equip, 52% of the participants had increased in the number of days per week they practiced the spiritual disciplines. Question 3 of the 2017 self-assessments revealed that 82% of the participants were more consistent in practicing the spiritual disciplines nine months after going through the program.

their own lives and apply the gospel there. And they gained confidence in talking about the gospel with others.[16] Most significantly, Equip fortified their conviction to make disciples of Jesus. Nearly all of the participants articulated that the Great Commission was meant for them personally and that they felt more ready to play a role in it.[17] Overall, these young leaders gained greater confidence in spiritual leadership,[18] no doubt because they had grown in some basic core competencies of spiritual leadership by going through the Equip program.

Equip had other strengths that resulted more from the format of the program than from the content. Because Equip took place over an entire calendar year, it gave sufficient time for the participants to build relationships with one another. There is something bonding about getting up early with the same group of people week after week to engage in important conversation. The group began to know one another and share life. In addition, they began to form an identity as a community of leaders and they began to see themselves that way. The majority of the participants felt a stronger sense of ownership for the life and health of our church after going through Equip.[19] Another benefit of the yearlong format was that I, as a pastor, was able to build relationships with these people and gain firsthand insight into their readiness for spiritual leadership. So, the program served as an informal vetting process for future leaders in our church. The practical projects were another strength to the format of Equip, because they allowed for

[16] In question 7 of the 2018-2019 self-assessments, 61% of respondents indicated an increase in their confidence to share the gospel with a non-Christian. According to question 7 of the 2017 self-assessments, 73% of respondents felt more confident in talking about the gospel than they did before going through Equip.

[17] See question 15 of the 2018-2019 self-assessments and question 16 of the 2017 self-assessments.

[18] See question 12 of the 2018-2019 self-assessments and question 6 of the 2017 self-assessments.

[19] See question 9 of the 2017 self-assessments.

immediate application of the content. If the content and discussions were addressing the "head and heart" of the participants, then the projects were a way of engaging their "hands." Everything that was talked about in Equip was meant to be put into practice in the lives of these young leaders, and the projects were like starter kits to get those practices going. The overall format of the program helped create a culture where participants were intentionally pursuing growth in their walk with God and intentionally looking for opportunities to pass on what they had learned to others. This was maybe the most important strength of the program: Its goal was to equip spiritual leaders, and it resulted in people actually leading others spiritually.[20]

Weaknesses of the Program

Despite the strengths of Equip, there were certainly things that could have been improved or done differently. One of the most common elements of feedback from the participants was that they would have liked more accountability in applying what they were learning. Accountability was technically built into the program, because the participants were to form smaller groups to meet occasionally during the breaks between quarters. This was intended to provide a chance to check in with one another and pray for one another as it related to their spiritual disciplines plan and other applications of the Equip content. However, the follow-through on these accountability groups was spotty. Most groups met a few times and then tapered off as the year went on. As the leader, I needed to do a better job of keeping them accountable to their accountability plans!

[20] Nine months after going through Equip, 90% of the 2017 Equip class said that they were currently discipling someone or leading others spiritually. See question 10 of the 2017 self-assessments.

Another weakness of the program was that there was no real hands-on practice of the things that were being learned, other than the practical projects (which were infrequent and took place outside of the regular meeting times). The program would be more effective if the participants were given both real and simulated experiences in doing things like sharing the gospel, leading a small group discussion, or walking through a case study of gospel application. The value of this would not only come from the practical experience, but also from the opportunity to be observed and receive feedback. Adding this element to Equip would require altering the format of some of the group meeting times, as well as adding some outside assignments where participants could engage in real-life practice with a mentor observing and giving input.

A final weakness about the Equip program is that there was no clear next step for the participants to receive further equipping in spiritual leadership. This program was meant to be an entry-level preparation in the minimum requirements for gospel-centered leadership in our church. However, an ongoing leadership development plan has not been established. Therefore, it is important to look ahead to next steps for further equipping.

Next Steps

In order to determine the next topics and competencies for the ongoing equipping of our spiritual leaders, it is important to consider both the expressed needs of our leaders and the needs that we as pastors see in them. The training need most frequently expressed by Equip participants was in the area of Bible-fluency. Half of the 2018 and 2019 participants said that lack of biblical knowledge impacted their confidence to lead others

spiritually.[21] Several people in the 2017 Equip class said that deficient knowledge of the Bible was the biggest gap they saw in themselves when it comes to making disciples or leading spiritually.[22] Of course, one way to grow in knowledge of the Bible is to read it, study it, and mediate upon it. These practices were reinforced by the Quarter 1 Equip curriculum. However, further training in biblical fluency is warranted for our leaders. I envision an equipping course that addresses topics like how we got the Bible, how the Bible is structured, an overview of the redemptive historical story of the Bible, and how to personally study the Bible (basic hermeneutics).

Another area where Equip participants expressed a need for further equipping was the area of evangelism. They want to grow in their ability to share the gospel more effectively. We really only spent one group meeting on this topic during Equip. Next steps in evangelism equipping would include things like learning to articulate the gospel simply, learning how to initiate spiritual conversations, learning how to discern where the gospel intersects the lives of people, and learning how to tell one's own story in evangelistic conversations.

Future equipping of spiritual leaders should also include an emphasis on what it means to be in union with Christ. This is something we talk about often as a church in our preaching and in our small group content. In fact, we regularly say that a Christian's union with Christ is the most important thing about them. To be "in Christ" and to have Christ "in us" changes everything about us. It brings forgiveness and healing to our past, it brings true power to change in our present, and it guarantees a glorious inheritance in

[21] See question 13 of the 2018-2019 self-assessments.
[22] See question 17 of the 2017 self-assessments.

our future. This would be an important topic for spiritual leaders to explore in an equipping format, especially as it relates to our sanctification. Along the same lines, future equipping classes need to address the ongoing theological development of our leaders. By this, I mean growing them in their understanding of things like systematic theology and biblical theology.

Finally, our leaders have a need for further practical equipping in the area of small group leadership. A few Equip participants specifically expressed this as an area of deficiency in their skills and knowledge. Leading a small group is one of the most challenging aspects of spiritual leadership, and there is typically no training in how to do it. People are often asked to step into that role in a church and then expected to learn how to do it as they do it. Training in the basic skills of leading a small group discussion is essential. This would include learning how to ask good questions, learning how to help a group explore biblical content, and learning to lead different personalities in a group. Furthermore, a small group leader needs to be equipped in understanding the basic categories involved in shepherding people: Connecting, caring, correcting, and counseling.

Transferability of the Program

The goal of implementing this program was not only to train a small group of young leaders within our church, but also to develop a simple equipping program that could be used in other churches or expanded to other formats within our church. Providence Church wants to be a church that plants other churches. In our history so far, we have planted one other church by sending out a pastor and a core team. And we have

been involved financially and logistically in a number of other church plants. All of these churches feel the need to equip their people to lead spiritually. The basic format of Equip could be easily used in these other churches. The overall vision, the books and discussion guides, the practical projects, and the suggested meeting schedule would be easy to share with other pastors and church leaders. Then they could tweak the program to fit their needs. For example, the books and topics could be swapped out for other books if they desired a different emphasis in a particular quarter. One thought I have for future equipping classes is to change Quarter 2 by doing a different book. Instead of *You Are What You Love* (which was loved by some participants and not liked by others), we might do a book on union with Christ or on biblical fluency.

Within our own church, the Equip program could be transferable to other formats. Some of these equipped leaders could take smaller groups (3-5 people) through the year-long program. This would enable the equipping to multiply and extend beyond what we can lead as pastors, reaching different pockets of our church. The biggest downside of doing that would be the loss of pastoral interaction with potential new leaders and the loss of a group identity that comes with having a larger mixed group. However, if we want to get this basic equipping out to more and more people, we will need to look for ways to be flexible in both the content and in who leads the groups.

A Final Word

Equipping the saints for ministry is integral to the vocation of a pastor. It is a vital aspect of shepherding people well and making disciples of Jesus. What I discovered through designing and implementing the Equip program for Providence Church is that a

simple investment of time in building relationships with young leaders and pouring into their development has a payoff that far exceeds the investment. Through these Equip classes, we not only have new leaders within our church, but I also have new friends with whom I have a shared experience. The call of Jesus to make disciples is not just a strategy to change the world, it is a joy for all those who participate in it!

APPENDIX A: EMAILS

Email to GC Leaders Requesting Recommendations for Equip Candidates

Hi GC Leaders,

This year Amy and I have been leading a group of emerging spiritual leaders through some equipping material to help prepare them for future spiritual leadership within the church. We've been aiming at 4 core competencies/values for leaders. Our approach has been to have the feel of a small-group gathering rather than a class. We've divided the year into quarters and covered one topic each quarter:

1. Personal walk with God (spiritual disciplines)
2. Spiritual formation (how our loves and liturgies form us)
3. Gospel-fluency and gospel-application (i.e. how to apply the gospel to your own life and help others do the same)
4. Personal disciple-making and missional life

This year has been a pilot program to see if this is a good way of equipping future leaders (before they step into a position of leadership). We are not finished with the year yet, and we will need to do some thorough evaluation with the current participants. But it's been a joy to get to know these folks and to see them engage the process so diligently. Amy and I walk away every week thankful that God has raised up a next generation of leaders like these.

Here's where I need your help: As the Providence staff thinks about inviting another group of people into this type of thing for 2018, we'd like to your input on whom we should invite. **Can you reply (to me only) and let me know if there are any emerging leaders in your GC that would be good to invite into something like this?** This would be people you see as future GC leaders or as leading in some other way in the church in the future.

Thanks for any input you have for me!

Todd

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Email Invitation to be a Part of Equip

Austin and Savannah,

Hope you are well! I'm writing to invite you into something that we believe is exciting and necessary for the life of our church. One of the things we value as a church is leadership development. Specifically, we want to have a culture where people are being invested in and equipped to lead others spiritually. As we seek to multiply disciples, multiply gospel communities, and multiply churches, it is vital to have people who are equipped to lead others in these things.

This coming year (January-December 2019), we will be gathering a small group of young leaders for a regular time of equipping and encouragement. This will be led by me and my wife Amy. The focus of the equipping will be on personal walk with God and spiritual leadership. This is for people who could see themselves leading in an official way in our church sometime in the next couple of years (i.e. as a GC leader, a deacon, or in some other capacity). If you see yourself in that way or aspire to that kind of spiritual leadership, then this could be for you.

Our aim is to equip future Providence leaders by focusing on 4 core competencies/values for spiritual leaders.

Here's the basic format and details:

- We will divide the year into quarters and emphasize one topic each quarter (which will involve reading a book together, meeting for discussion, and doing one practical assignment/project each quarter). The first quarter will focus on personal walk with God (spiritual disciplines). The second quarter will focus on a broader understanding of spiritual formation (how our loves and liturgies form us). The third quarter will focus on gospel fluency and gospel application. The fourth quarter will focus on missional life and personal disciple-making.
- We will meet 6:30-8:00 AM Wednesdays at the Providence office for 7 or 8 Wednesday mornings per quarter (total of 29 meetings for the year).
- This will not be a class, but will have more of a small group discussion feel. We'll meet as a co-ed group, but sometimes we'll split up in gender-specific cohorts.
- This would replace your d-group for the year, if you are in one (i.e. so that you're not adding another meeting to your schedule).

Commitments to participate:

- Be there every week, missing no more than one meeting per quarter. *****See the attached photo for the dates we plan to meet (the dates are circled in red).***
- Keep up with the reading each week and come prepared to participate in the discussion.
- Do the practical project each quarter (these are not labor-intensive…they're very simple, but important to the process).

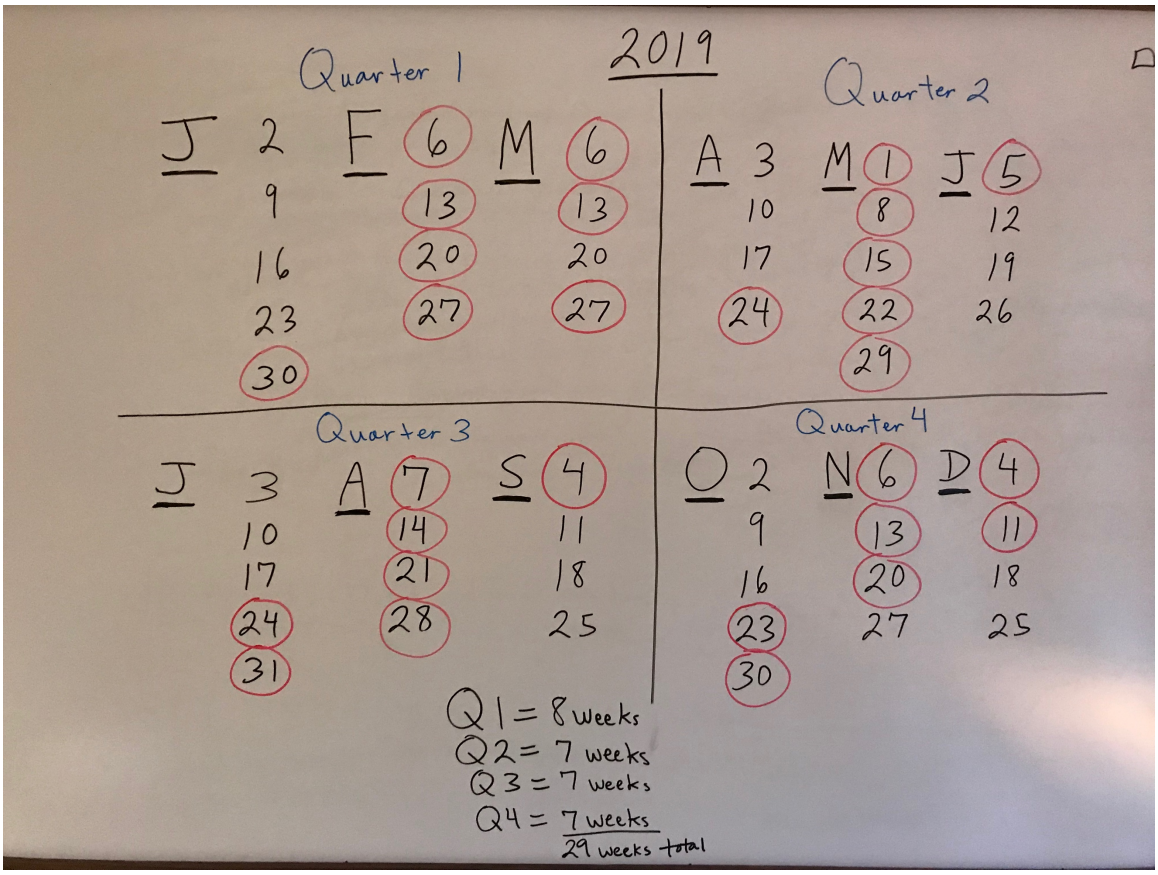
- Pay $60 (which covers the cost of the books). Light breakfast and coffee will be provided each week.

<u>Here's my question for you</u>: Are you interested in being a part of this? It will involve your commitment to both presence and participation, as well as a desire to grow in leading others spiritually. But it will also be really edifying to be around these particular people talking about these particular things.

Will you pray about this and then let me know your interest and any questions you might have?

Thanks,

Todd



APPENDIX B: DISCUSSION GUIDES

Discussion Guide for Quarter 1 Meetings: *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney

WEEK 1—Chapter 1—*The Spiritual Disciplines for the Purpose of Godliness*

1. **Introductions:** Name and what you do vocationally. Who is someone who has had a significant influence in your relationship w/Christ (what's something you learned from them)?
2. **Explain what Equip is** *(i.e. Not a book study, not a class. A community of spiritual leaders exploring together what it means to walk with God, apply the gospel, and make disciples)*. Give overview of the 4 quarters/books. Explain why we've structured the year as we have (i.e. with breaks).
3. When you hear the term "spiritual disciplines" what are some of your initial thoughts or feelings (positive or negative)? Honestly.
4. When it comes to spiritual disciplines, we need to start with a vision of who we are becoming (p.2). How would you describe the type of person you want to be becoming? *What are some things you want to be true of you when you're 70?* Be specific. What is compelling about that vision?
5. **Our purpose for the spiritual disciplines is growing in Christ-likeness (or godliness).** Whitney defines godliness as both closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ (p. 9). Why do you think he mentions both of these things?
6. **Let's take a few minutes to get your general thoughts from the reading. Were there any specific things that stood out to you?**
7. Why is believing the gospel so important when we pursue the spiritual disciplines? *(Because keeping the spiritual disciplines is not our righteousness…we don't want a new legalism to replace the grace we have in Christ)*
8. What would be the difference between a spiritual discipline derived from the gospel and a spiritual discipline divorced from the gospel (p. 8)? For example, take Bible reading or prayer?
    a. *"We cannot be godly without the practice of the disciplines, but we can practice the disciplines without being godly."* (p. 9) Why? What do you think this means?
9. Which spiritual disciplines come easiest for you? Most difficult?
10. Related to the middle paragraph p. 15: *Why do you think we tend to give up so easily on the spiritual disciplines, when we're willing to stick with other difficult things?*
11. What do you think about the idea of "freedom through discipline" (p. 17-18)? The two concepts sound contradictory.

12. I love the image on p. 15 of developing *"deep, time-worn channels of communing discipline between a person and God."* The disciplines are relational. What would help you to see them this way?

WEEK 2—Chapters 2 & 3—*Bible Intake (Part 1 & 2)*

1. *"No spiritual discipline is more important than the intake of God's word"* (p.22). Do you agree with that? Why or why not?
2. What were some of your immediate takeaways from the reading this week?
3. What is the Bible? How would you describe it to someone who had never heard of it before? Could you explain how the Bible is structured?
    - Pentateuch [5]
    - Other historical books [12]
    - Wisdom books [5]
    - Prophets [17] *(5 major & 12 minor)*
    - Gospels [4]
    - Acts [1]
    - Epistles [21]
    - Revelation [1]
4. What does the Bible say about itself? Look at 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:19-21 and make some observations.
5. Why do you think Christians often have convictions about the Bible being the Word of God while simultaneously spending so little time in the Bible?
6. What are your biggest personal challenges to spending time in the Bible?
7. If your growth in godliness were measured by the quality of your Bible intake, what would be the result? (from p. 33)
8. What is one thing you could do to improve your intake of God's word? (from p. 34) No matter what your current practice, is there something simple you could do to improve your time in the Bible?
9. When it comes to the Bible disciplines of study, memorization, and meditation, which do you find the most challenging? Was there anything in the reading that encourages you in these?
10. Which of the methods of meditation (pp. 56-68) most resonated with you and why?
11. FINAL 20 MINUTES: Let's put this discipline into practice together. We're gonna read, listen to, observe, meditate upon, and apply a text of scripture together. It's actually a text of scripture ABOUT scripture. Spend the last 20 minutes in Psalm 19 Bible study (giving at least 5 minutes for personal meditation).

WEEK 3—Chapters 4 & 5—*Prayer and Worship*

*Split into 2 groups for discussion today.

1. **Read Luke 18:1-8.** What grabs you personally about what Jesus is teaching here? What contributes to you losing heart in prayer?
2. What were some of your takeaways from reading the prayer chapter?
3. How would you describe your personal prayer life? This is not a question to make you feel bad. Rather, let's tell each other what prayer looks like for you *(i.e. When do you pray? Where? How often? About what?)*
4. What motivates you to pray? What barriers do you face in prayer?
5. How would you describe the link between meditating on scripture and praying (pp. 86-93)?
6. Can anyone tell about a time you saw God answer prayer clearly or obviously?
7. **We'll end today by taking the last 15 minutes to pray together.** Do the Martin Luther prayer exercise. This is a simple way to combine scripture meditation and prayer. *Read the passage out loud. Have everyone spend a couple minutes on their own filling in the card. Have a few people share what they put for the "instruction of the text." Then spend some time in corporate prayer: Praising and thanking, confessing, and praying.*
8. General impressions or takeaways from the worship chapter?
9. How would you describe vain worship? (see Matthew 15:8-9)
10. When you think about gathered worship at Providence, how have you seen the different elements of the liturgy personally form you and help you worship God? *(i.e. Call to worship, confession, assurance of pardon, singing, profession of faith, corporate prayer, reading of the word, preaching of the word, communion, benediction)*
11. Regarding corporate worship, Whitney says, *"There are some graces and blessings that our Father gives only when we meet together with other believers as his family"* (p. 111). Do you agree with this? If so, what graces and blessings only come in corporate worship?
12. **Read John 4:23-24.** What does it mean to worship in spirit? What does it mean to worship in truth? Do you more naturally lean toward worshipping in spirit or in truth (i.e. with your heart or your head)?

WEEK 4—Chapters 6 & 7—*Evangelism and Serving (living the gospel in word and deed)*

1. What thoughts and feelings do you have when you hear the word evangelism? Why?
2. General impressions or observations from the evangelism chapter?
3. **Read 1 Peter 2:9-10.** Make some observations about this text. What takeaways do you have?
4. Why do most Christians (including me) seem to disobey Jesus' command to evangelize? (p. 122) What barriers keep you from sharing the gospel?
5. Evangelism is empowered by the Holy Spirit & by the power of the gospel itself (pp. 124-125). *Have you ever seen the power of the gospel change a person's life? Tell us about it.*

6. How can we better discipline ourselves to be with unbelievers? What are some practical ways that have worked for you?
7. ***For the last 15-20 minutes of our time today, we'll split into men/women groups and pray for some specific people we'd like to see come to know Christ:***
    a. *Who is someone on your heart you'd like to engage in spiritual conversation?*
    b. *List & pray for them by name.*
    c. *Pray for barriers to having a gospel conversation with them.*
    d. *Pray for what you think might be barriers to them coming to Christ.*
8. General impressions or observations from the serving chapter?
9. God called Christ "my servant" (read Isaiah 42:1-4). Jesus self-identified as one who came to serve. How did Jesus live out this part of his identity (be specific) and what do we learn from this?
10. On p. 143, Whitney says *"the flesh connives against the hiddenness and sameness"* of serving. Where do you feel your flesh at work when it comes to serving? *(i.e. keeping you from serving; giving you false motivations for serving; etc.)*
11. Which of the 6 biblical motivations for serving were you most convicted by? Which resonated with you most?
12. Have you discovered anything about your spiritual gift(s) through serving? If so, what?
13. What would disciplining myself to serve look like practically? Give some specific ideas.

WEEK 5—Chapter 8—*Stewardship*

1. **Spend a few minutes in Psalm 90.** What is God saying to you through this Psalm right now? Observations? Applications?
2. General observations and thoughts from this chapter on stewardship?
3. Have you ever had something happen in your life to remind you of the preciousness of time? What was it?
4. What challenges do you feel most when it comes to stewarding your time? *(Procrastination? Busyness? Selfishness? Too much time spent on entertainment or pleasure? Working when should be playing/resting or vice versa?)*
5. Were you convicted about anything related to how you spend your time (i.e. do you need to apply more discipline in this area)?
6. What are some examples of spending your time well? What is a recent experience where you left feeling like that was a really fruitful or worshipful use of your time?
7. What is your practice of Sabbath? *(Not a day off, but a day with…with the Lord and with the people who give you life)*

8. What do you think about the statement on p. 169 that "our money represents us"? In what ways is this true? How does money reveal our heart, values, priorities, etc.? How does it reveal our idols? Can you give specific examples?
9. What differences would it make in your life if you lived like God owned everything? (p. 170-171)
10. This chapter mentions the importance of sacrificial giving. How would you describe sacrificial giving? Why is it important that our giving be sacrificial?
11. How have you experienced joy in giving? How have you grown in this area of your life?
12. Were you convicted or challenged about anything related to how you handle your money (or related to giving)?
13. **To close (last 10 minutes), everyone get in pairs: Share one thing you want to grow in related to stewarding your time and one thing related to stewarding your money, and then pray for one another.**

**Next week, we'll be discussing Fasting and Silence & Solitude (which may be disciplines you've thought less about). It's a little more reading…50ish pages.

WEEK 6—Chapters 9 & 10—*Fasting and Silence & Solitude*

These two disciplines feel the most counter-cultural of all the disciplines we've discussed, because our culture is largely self-indulgent, gluttonous, and averse to self-denial. It is also noisy, busy, and crowded.

1. **Spend a few minutes in Matthew 6:16-18.** Observations, thoughts, or questions that come to you as you read this?
2. General thoughts or takeaways from the fasting chapter?
3. *"Self-indulgence is the enemy of gratitude."* (p. 191) Do you agree with this? How have you seen it to be true in your own life?
4. Have you ever thought of fasting as assumed (p. 196)? Why or why not?
5. How does voluntarily experiencing physical hunger help you achieve a spiritual purpose and grow in Christ-likeness (p. 200 and 219)?
6. What's your personal experience with fasting? Have you ever tried it? Do you have any fears or anxieties related to fasting?
7. Did any of the 10 spiritual purposes for fasting stand out to you (and how so)?
8. What current needs in your life, the life of the church, or in the world might prompt you to fast?
9. General thoughts or observations from the silence and solitude chapter?
10. In what specific ways have you seen yourself conditioned by life in our culture to feel more comfortable with noise and/or crowds than with silence and solitude?
11. Do you have a place where you can withdraw and experience silence and solitude?

12. What do you think about the concept of "wordless worship" on p. 229? What do you like or not like about it? How might it be formative?
13. Discuss John Owen quote on p. 234-235. What are some things your "alone time" reveals about you?
14. What obstacles do you face in practicing silence and solitude? How could you overcome those obstacles?
15. How do you think times of disciplined silence and solitude can grow you in godliness? *(i.e. what's the connection between silence and godliness?)*
16. **Hand out the *Spiritual Disciplines Project* instructions and discuss. We'll present these to one another on March 27**.
17. **Let's end with 10 minutes of silence *(It will feel long, but let's have a disciplined 10 minutes of silence. You can spread out in the office here, and I'll let you know when 10 minutes is up.)***

WEEK 7—Chapters 11 & 12—*Journaling and Learning*

1. Let's talk about the learning chapter first. General thoughts or things that grabbed your attention?
2. Disciple means learner. How would you say learning is integral to being a disciple of Jesus?
3. A wise person can learn from anybody, regardless of age or background (p. 273). Have you ever learned something from an unexpected person or source?
4. How does learning express love for God (p.275)?
5. What did you think about the idea that learning for godliness is mostly by discipline, not by accident (pp. 278-280)? Why does our flesh resist this kind of intentionality?
6. What is something you are learning lately (related to the gospel or your relationship with God)?
7. Are there any ways you are intentionally seeking to learn? Or are there things you are interested in learning but need to be more intentional?
8. Let's transition to talking about journaling. **Let's read Psalm 31.** What observations do you have about what David writes to the Lord? What sort of things does he write about? What do you learn from this "devoted writing" that you could apply in your own life?
9. General thoughts or things that grabbed your attention in the journaling chapter?
10. How many of you have a practice of journaling? Tell us a little about your practice? What do you do and how does it help you grow in Christ-likeness?
11. Can you think of a time when writing helped you in some way? *(i.e. To process a decision? To be more exact in what you thought about something? To pray? To prepare for a conversation?)*
12. Which of the reasons to journal stood out to you and why?
13. What barriers or objections prevent you from journaling?

14. To end our time, let's take 15 minutes alone to write. Use this time however you want: To write prayers. To write praise and thanksgiving. To reflect on how you are doing or what's going on in your life. To help you meditate on scripture. To help clarify something you're seeking the Lord about.
    a. As a potential guide, look at the description of George Whitefield's journal on p. 264 (*"He records any unusual activity…recorded without inhibition.")*.

WEEK 8—Present Projects and brief discussion of Chapter 13—*Perseverance in the Disciplines*

1. Anything in particular hit you from this chapter?
2. *"The godly person is a busy person"* (p. 288). What do you think about that? Agree? Is there bad busyness and good busyness?
3. *The role of the Holy Spirit: Only God can make us godly.* Why do you think it's easy to forget the Holy Spirit in practicing the disciplines?
4. *"Far too often socializing becomes a substitute for fellowship."* (p. 294). Have you seen this to be true?
5. Why is understanding the role of struggle in the Christian life so important?
6. Did you have any big "takeaways" from this first quarter book/topic?
7. **Let's take 5 minutes each to present our spiritual disciplines projects (i.e. what we are specifically planning to do for the year and how it will grow us in godliness).**

Close by praying for one another related to living out the project this year.

Discussion Guide for Quarter 2 Meetings: *You Are What You Love* by James K.A. Smith

WEEK 1—Chapter 1—*You Are What You Love: To Worship is Human*

On page 10, Smith writes, *"This model [of the human person] provides a framework for thinking about the task of discipleship, the nature of sanctification, and the role of worship."* That's what we're aiming to talk about in Quarter 2…a more holistic understanding of how we (and others we disciple) are spiritually formed (how we grow in Christ-likeness).

1. What were your initial impressions as you read chapter 1?
2. Why is *"what do you want"* such a fundamental question to discipleship (p. 1)?
3. We talk often at Providence about a disciple being a learner. But that raises the question: *What does it mean to learn something? What would you say?*

4. How would you define "thinking-thingism" (p. 3-4)? How does this view line up with how you have experienced discipleship or approached sanctification?
5. How would our approach to discipleship and Christian formation change if we saw ourselves as defined by what we desire, not what we know? (p. 7)
6. *"You can't not love"* (p. 10). Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. Smith says we are teleological beings (*"on the move, pursuing something, directed toward something"*—p. 8) What are some of the things you would include in your "vision of the good life" (p. 11)? In other words, describe some aspects of the kingdom you desire.
8. Smith gives examples of what he calls *"second-nature default orientation"* like a golf swing or piano scales (p. 19). Can you give examples of other things you do without thinking? Has anyone ever marveled at a second-nature skill you have and asked you to explain how you do it? How did you acquire this skill?
9. Smith says our desires are *"caught more than they are taught"* (p. 22). Think of a good teacher, coach, mentor, or parent. How was this true of them as a teacher and you as a learner? Can you give a specific example of something you "caught" from them?
10. Smith calls a liturgy *a formative, love-shaping ritual (p. 22).* Then he says, *"to be human is to be a liturgical animal"* (p. 23). Can you think of some examples of this?
11. David Foster Wallace's commencement address touches on deep theological themes, although Wallace was not religious (pp. 23–24). What can we learn about human desire and worship from discussing it with people who are not religious?
12. *"Worship is the heart of discipleship. Learning to love God takes practice"* (p. 25). Thoughts about these statements?
13. Worship, according to Smith, is *"counter-formation to those rival liturgies we are often immersed in"* (p. 25). How does Smith's understanding change our view of worship? If this is true, what's at stake when we come to worship?

WEEK 2—Chapter 2—*You Might Not Love What You Think: Learning to Read "Secular" Liturgies*

1. Would you open the door to the Room in the scene from Stalker on p. 28 *("in the Room you get exactly what you want…your innermost wish will be made true here")*? Why might you hesitate?

2. Do you think it is possible to be blind to our innermost and deepest desires? If so, why? Or why not?

3. Michael Novak's paradigm on 3 kinds of faith is helpful:
    a. **Public convictions**—What we **say** we believe, and want people to believe about us. (we want to present ourselves in the best possible light)
    b. **Private convictions**—What we **think** we believe, but those convictions

struggle when tested. (we want to think of ourselves in the best possible light)

c. **Core convictions**—What we **actually** believe, shown by how we actually live (our daily life, practices, and habits).

Can you think of an example in your own life where there is a gap between your public/private convictions and your core convictions? *(i.e. I say I care about the poor because God does. But in practice, I do little to show that I care. OR I would say I want God's glory above all else, but do my actions suggest that I really want my glory?)*

4. *"In short, we unconsciously learn to love rival kingdoms because we don't realize we're participating in rival liturgies"* (p. 37). *A liturgy is just a love-shaping ritual.* Scary thought. Can you think of examples of this in your own life?

5. Smith argues that the point of apocalyptic books like Daniel and Revelation is not predicting the future but *"unveiling the realities around us for what they really are"* (p. 39). For example, John's apocalyptic vision in Revelation presents Rome, not as the zenith of human accomplishment, but as a monster. What do you see in the American Dream if you view it apocalyptically (i.e. from heaven's perspective)? *(What do you see on the surface and what do you see if you pull back the curtain?)*

6. What did you think about Smith's example of the shopping mall as a place of worship? The shopping mall's threats are not in its ideas, but in its rituals (p. 41). Why is this?
7. The mall might not be as prevalent in shaping us in the consumer gospel as it used to be. *But what are some of the rituals and implicit beliefs of Amazon and how are they forming in us?*

8. We need to learn to consider other cultural institutions in the same way Smith treats the mall and its consumer gospel (things like social media, the university, political campaigns, entertainment, or athletic events). **Let's do a liturgical analysis of the practices of social media:**
    a. First, what are some of your rituals/practices related to social media (i.e. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter)
    b. What vision of the good life is carried in the liturgies/rituals of social media? What promises do they make?
    c. What gospel do these rituals preach (or what story is embedded in them)…something that mirrors CFRC?
    d. What do they implicitly teach you about yourself? Other people? The world?
    e. What kind of person do they want you to become? What do they want you to love?

9. **Or another exercise:**
    a. What are your regular practices and rituals with your smartphone (honestly)?
    b. In what ways is the liturgy of the smartphone forming us?
    c. What vision of the world is it teaching us (about ourselves and the world around us)?
    d. How is it forming our loves and longings?

10. Why is taking a "liturgical audit of our lives" important to discipleship? *"Because we need to become aware of our immersions. 'This is water.'"* (p. 38). This is a good step in sanctification.

**Hand out Spiritual Formation project (to be presented on June 5).

WEEK 3—Chapter 3—*The Spirit Meets You Where You Are: Historic Worship for a Postmodern Age*

1. Show the "Backwards Brain Bicycle" video (stop at 7:00 min). *In what ways is learning to follow Jesus like learning to ride a backwards bicycle? What insights about the process of discipleship to Jesus do we gain from this video? (Knowledge doesn't equal understanding. You can know what to do but not do it…or not be able to do it.)*
2. What are some cultural "scripts" that influence the way we live without us even knowing it? That is, they've gotten into our unconscious way of life like riding a bike? *Radical individualism, distrust of authority, unfettered freedom, relativity of truth, personal comfort, consumerism and choices.* Why and how are these contrary to following Jesus?
3. Initial thoughts you had (or questions that were raised) as you read this chapter?
4. Smith lists two things that are required for new disciplines to take hold: a community and a commitment to practices we might not initially enjoy. Can you think of a change in your life that required these two things (p. 62)?
5. *"Rituals change habits which (in turn) generate new hungers" (p. 64)*. Why doesn't it work the other way around? *(Because often our tastes are acquired…our hungers have been trained over a period of time.) John Hannah on flossing: "A discipline became a habit became a delight."*
6. Why do we tend to look for God in the extraordinary rather than in the ordinary (p. 67)? In what ways do you find yourself looking for the "next big thing" (Michael Horton quote) in your spiritual life?
7. *"The church's worship is the heart of discipleship"* (p. 68). What do you think about that thesis? How have you seen the gathered worship of the church form you in recent years? Can you think of specific ways?
8. *"Worship is a site of God's action, not just God's presence"* (p. 71). In what ways is God active in our weekly worship? How would it change your approach to worship if you saw it that way?

9. Why do you think both form and content matter in worship? How does "form" form us (or teach us)? (Think about "top-down" versus "bottom-up" forms…who is the primary actor in worship?)
10. Some Christians experience repetition in worship as "insincere and inauthentic" (p. 80). What more positive view of repetition does Smith offer? *"Repetition is how God rehabituates us…There is no formation without repetition."*

WEEK 4—Chapter 4—*What Story Are You In? The Narrative Arc of Formative Christian Worship*

1. What is one takeaway you had from this chapter?
2. The telos that the Bible portrays is not just a "spiritual" heaven but "a heavenly order that becomes a reality on earth" (p. 86). That is, God wants to bring his kingdom and shalom to earth. Does this change how we think about heaven? Does this change how we hear the story of Scripture? If so, how?
3. How should worship answer the question of our purpose in life…or what we're "here for" (p. 88)? Is this a question we as worshipers naturally bring to worship?
4. What is the purpose of worship? If you had to state in one sentence why we gather on Sundays, what would it be? (brainstorm a sentence on the whiteboard)
5. If the telos for Christians is Christ (p. 90), how should that shape our worship?
6. When was the last time you were moved in gathered worship (p. 91)? Can you remember what it was that moved you?
7. Take the following quotation from the bottom of p. 91 and adapt it for a church: *"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."* Start with "If you want to build a church . . ." How would you finish the sentence?
8. Smith narrates the sequence of historic Christian worship (p. 96). How is this sequence represented in our church's worship? Do you experience our church's worship as a story?
9. What would we lose if we removed confession from corporate worship (p. 97, 104-105)? What about other elements (like communion, or corporate prayer, or profession of faith, or benediction)?
10. In what specific ways does the liturgy of worship counter the secular liturgies that have deformed us?
11. Have you seen the liturgy of worship seep into your way of life outside of Sundays (i.e. how you see God and people; how you relate to God and people)?

WEEK 5—Chapter 5—*Guard Your Heart: The Liturgies of Home*

1. What are some ways you were formed (both positively and negatively) by simply growing up in the household you did (p. 113)?
2. What was the "hum" of your household…the unspoken vibe carried in the daily

rituals? (p. 127)? How did that hum tune your heart to sing his grace and how did it not?

3. Initial thoughts you had or questions that were raised as you read this chapter?
4. Was there an aspect of baptism that you haven't thought about before (pp. 114–18)? How does this change your view of baptism?
5. On p. 116, Smith calls the church our "first family." What difference would it make in our lives if we regarded the church in that way? What challenges or reservations do you feel in seeing the church like that?
6. What did you think about looking at the wedding industry apocalyptically? What are some things you see when you pull back the curtain?
7. The rituals of the wedding industry can be "liturgies of narcissism" (p. 121). Can you think of recent example of a wedding you went to that had these characteristics? Or one that didn't? What was your experience?
8. "The myths we load into weddings almost doom marriages to fail" (p. 120). What does he mean by that? How does the way we treat weddings affect our view of marriage (for good or for bad)?
9. How do we sometimes treat baptism and weddings as expressive, "bottom-up" rituals, and what does that teach us implicitly about what it means to be a family or household?
10. Smith describes how marriage can be a mission to "bear witness" to the kingdom (p. 124). Describe a marriage or a friendship you know of that fits this description.
11. See quote on bottom of p. 127 *("Your household could have Bible inputs everyday and Bible verses on every wall, but the rhythms and unspoken rituals could still reinforce things like consumerism, production, and self-centeredness.")* Can you think of household rituals, rhythms, or norms that might promote the love of the world? What about rituals that would promote the love of God's kingdom?
12. If you did a liturgical audit in your household (taking into account the context of your living situation), what are some of the routines that you take for granted that might be doing something to you and to those in your household? (p. 128)
13. Smith says that mealtime rituals can be formative in a household (p. 132). Why is the table so formative? How can we intentionally foster meaningful mealtime conversations?

Chapter 6—*Teach Your Children Well: Learning by Heart*

1. Initial thoughts you had or questions that were raised as you read this chapter?
2. What would it look like to learn to follow Jesus like Smith learned his way around his hometown (p. 138)? He learned it "on the ground," not by looking at a map. How would you translate that way of learning to the Christian life?
3. Smith argues that all education is formation (pp. 139, 159). How would you answer a skeptic who says that nonreligious education can be morally neutral?
4. What were your thoughts about Smith's observations about formative and de-formative youth ministry *(pp. 143-154)*? What was your experience of the church as a youth *(i.e. More expressivist or formative? Worshipping separate from*

adults or with them? Driven by entertainment or by service and spiritual practices?)?

5. Why are supportive adults so important to the formation of teens (see box on p. 154)? How can churches encourage relationships between teens and adults?
6. On p. 163, Smith describes how providing coffee for his students became a contemplative practice (i.e. the physical act of making coffee helped him to slow down and think about his students and pray for them). *Is there a simple ritual you could implement in your weekly routine that might become an act of transformative hospitality or prayer?*
7. Every university has particular "rites of initiation and inculcation into the community" (pp, 166-167). These are things we learn by practice… maybe starting at freshman orientation, or carried out at football games, or during exam weeks, or during other special events, etc. *What are some of these that you experienced at your university? How did they form you beyond just giving you information? What story did they tell about the purpose of the university? (i.e. "What starts here changes the world.")*

WEEK 6—Present Projects

Discussion Guide for Quarter 3 Meetings: *The Prodigal God* by Tim Keller and *You Can Change* by Tim Chester

WEEK 1

The purpose of this first week is to re-connect, check in on how everyone's spiritual disciplines plans are going, and discuss *Prodigal God*. Also, hand out *You Can Change* and talk about the importance of "gospel fluency" in our own sanctification and in the discipleship of others. Let everyone know the plan for the next 6 weeks (how the reading & discussion will work…i.e. the project will be part of the reading and an aspect of the project will be discussed each week).

1. How are things going with your spiritual disciplines plan?
    a. What's been going well (any particular ways you've seen yourself grow in Christ-likeness)?
    b. Where have you been struggling?
    c. Pray for one another

2. **Read Luke 15:11-32**
    a. In what ways have you seen younger brother tendencies in yourself at times?

    b. What about elder brother tendencies?
    c. What observations do you have about the father in the parable?
    d. How are both younger and elder brothers rejecting the father?
3. What are some of the big takeaways you got from *Prodigal God*?
4. Anything new or refreshing about the gospel that you learned from the book?
5. "Breaking all the rules" and "keeping all the rules" are both forms of lostness. How so?
6. What would the true elder brother do (that the elder brother in the parable didn't)?
7. Anything in particular hit you in the hope & feast chapters (chs 6 & 7)?
8. Why do you think the gospel is the A-Z of the Christian life (p. 134)?
9. **Hand out *You Can Change***.
    a. Explain importance of gospel fluency (learning to apply the gospel to all of life). The gospel is how we change and grow! See quotes on p. 128 & 129 of *Prodigal God* (eating/drinking the gospel and repeatedly setting our hearts to "gospel-mode").
    b. Give dates for the chapters.
    c. **Explain the project** (be as specific as possible in what you choose…see p. 21 in book. Also see Galatians 5:19-24 for ideas)

You Can Change by Tim Chester

WEEK 2

Split into men's and women's groups to discuss these two chapters. You may not have time to get to every question, but be sure to leave time for the last question in each chapter (which deals with the change project).

Chapter 1—*What Would You Like to Change?*

1. General thoughts or observations on chapter 1?
2. Read Romans 8:28-30. How do these verses shape how you think about gospel change?
3. Reflection question #1 on p. 20.
4. Everyone take a few minutes to share the specific area you've chosen where you would like to see change (p. 22). *What would conformity to Jesus look like in this area of your life?*

Chapter 2—*Why Would You Like to Change?*

1. Which faulty reason for change do you find yourself most gravitating towards or resonating with? How do you see this play out?
    - *"I want to change so that God will bless me."*

- *"I want to change to impress people."*
- *"I want to change to feel good about myself."*

2. Which true motive for change (based on your new identity) do you find most motivating? Why so?
    - *"I'm a child of the Father."*
    - *"I'm the bride of the Son."*
    - *"I'm the home of the Holy Spirit."*
3. Reflection question #2 on p. 37
4. Everyone take a few minutes to share why you want to change in the specific area you have chosen (p. 39).

WEEK 3

In men's and women's groups, take some time to broadly discuss the reading from **chapters 3 & 4**, and then spend the bulk of the time discussing the change projects.

1. What stood out to you in the reading? Any big takeaways?
2. How have you tried faulty approaches to change in your life (i.e. legalism, self-help, self-righteousness, etc.) and what was the result?
3. Give everyone a few minutes to talk about their reflections on their change projects from chapters 3 & 4. Encourage cross-talk and questions.
    a. What is an aspect of God's work of change that especially gives you confidence that you can change? (p. 59)
    b. Tell us what you wrote for your summary of when you sin and what's going on in your heart when you sin. (p. 71)

WEEK 4

Gather everyone in one big group and take 10 minutes to read Galatians 5:19-24 and teach the change-flow diagram (using your own change project as an example). This diagram gives a good picture of the overall gospel change process we are seeking to apply.

Split into men's/women's groups to discuss **chapter 5** reading and personal change projects.

1. General thoughts from the reading? Anything catch your attention or interest?
2. *"Behind every sin and negative emotion is a lie."* (p. 73) Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
3. *"Sanctification is the progressive narrowing of the gap between confessional faith and functional faith."* (p. 75) What does that mean? Do you find it to be true?
4. What truths do you need to turn to in your change project? (p. 97) Are there specific scriptures or truths about God you need to turn to?

WEEK 5

Gather everyone in one big group to review change-flow diagram.

Split into men's/women's groups to discuss **chapter 6** reading and personal change projects.

1. General thoughts from the reading? Anything catch your attention or interest?
2. *"Desire determines behavior. We always do what we want to do."* (p. 102) Do you think this is true? Can you think of a recent example of this in your life (with either a good desire or bad desire)?
3. *"One common way desires deceive us is by masquerading as needs."* (p. 105). Have you ever seen this to be true with a particular desire (i.e. love or respect)? How does it play out?
4. Any thoughts or questions about repentance (pp. 106-110)? What does repentance look like in a typical everyday moment (flesh it out)?
5. What heart desires do you need to turn from (repent of) in your particular change project (p. 115)? Can you think of a specific example of when that sinful desire (or heart idol) triggered your particular sin?

WEEK 6

Split into men's/women's groups to discuss **chapters 7 & 8** reading and personal change projects.

1. General thoughts from the reading? Anything catch your attention or interest or challenge you in some way?
2. Often we want to change the consequences of sin, but not the sin itself (p. 125). How can I tell the difference? Meaning, how do I know when I hate the sin itself?
3. With your particular change project, do you find yourself more often excusing, minimizing, or hiding your sin? How does this play out (i.e. what did you write down on p. 132)?
4. What strategies do you need to adopt to reinforce repentance and faith (i.e. what did you write down on p. 149)?

WEEK 7

Stay together as one large group for this final meeting. Discuss **chapters 9 & 10**. Then discuss personal takeaways from the general topic of gospel change (gospel fluency) covered in this quarter.

Opening question: *Can anyone lead us through the gospel change-flow diagram on the whiteboard?*

Chapters 9 & 10

1. General thoughts from chapters 9 & 10? Anything catch your attention?

2. *"God has placed us in a community of change*" (p. 151). How are we doing as a church in emphasizing and enabling change? What could we grow in?
3. *"Even our private, secret sins affect the community"* (p. 152). How so? Do you ever think of your sin in this way?
4. *Change is a lifetime task (not a one-time event). It's a marathon, not a sprint.* How many of you have been discouraged during this 7 weeks by the VERY SIN you are working on? What will keep you going when it feels like you aren't changing?

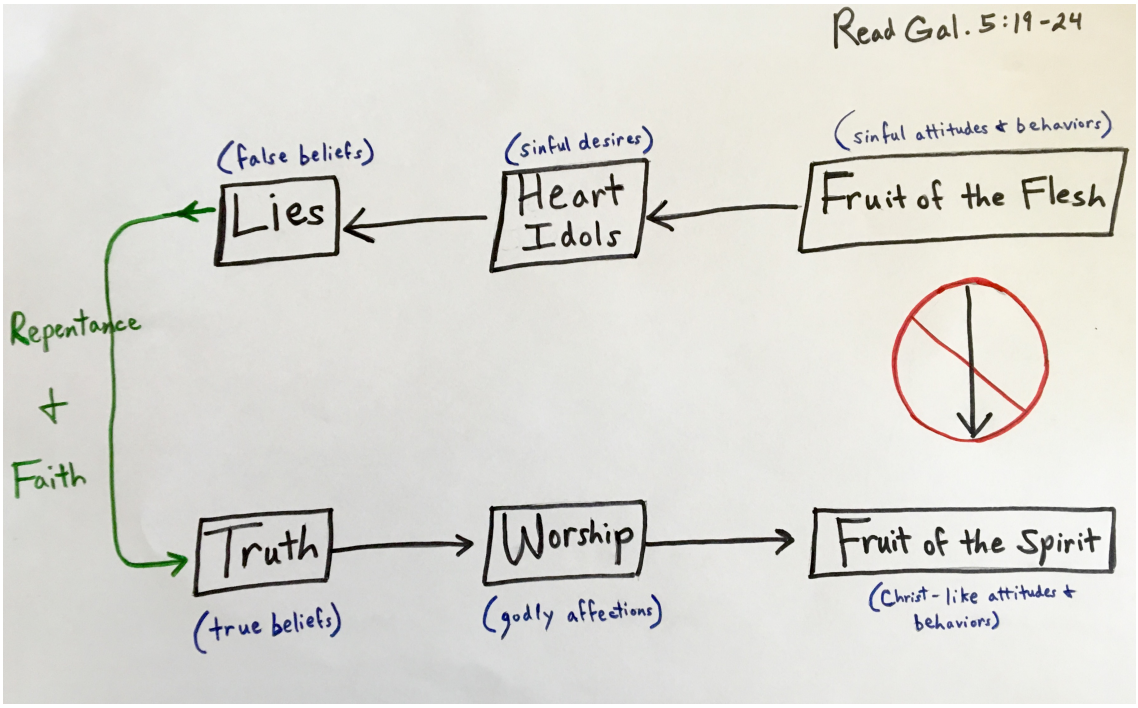
Personal Takeaways from this quarter of going through a gospel-change project:

1. What have you learned about yourself as you've gone through this process? Any new insights or discoveries?
2. What have you learned about the gospel?
3. Any new insights on how sanctification (gospel-centered change) works?

Spend some time praying for one another and for our community as we seek to change into the likeness of Christ.

- Pray for perseverance.
- Pray for hope (i.e. we can change and we are changing).
- Pray for the rhythm of repentance and faith in our lives.
- Pray that we would be a community of truth, repentance, and grace.
- Pray that we would consistently point each other to Jesus.

The Gospel Change Flow Diagram



Discussion Guide for Quarter 4 Meetings: *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman

WEEK 1—Foreword, Introduction, and Preface

1. Before we jump into a new topic, let's touch base on previous topics: How is it going with your gospel change project? Any new discoveries, encouragements, or frustrations as you have sought to apply the gospel to your life? How are things going with your spiritual disciplines? Is God teaching you anything in particular right now?

2. Okay, let's transition to our topic for this quarter:
    a. Let's look at **Matthew 28:16-20**
        i. What observations do you have about Jesus' primary objective for the church from this passage? (i.e. what do you see here? Let's pummel this text with observations)
        ii. What are some of the things that would be necessary to carry out Jesus' objective?

iii. What excites you about this? Where do you feel inadequate, or hesitant, or fearful?

b. Let's look at **Acts 1:8**

i. What observations do you have about Jesus' primary objective for the church from this verse? (Again, talk about everything you see here.)

ii. What excites you about this? Where do you feel inadequate, hesitant, fearful?

3. How would you summarize the basic objectives of Jesus from these verses?
4. When you think about the organization and activities of our church, are we set up to achieve the basic objectives of Jesus? Honest thoughts.
   a. What are we doing well in this regard?
   b. What would we need to change or do differently to be more about his objectives?
5. When you hear words like "evangelism" and "make disciples," what are your initial thoughts or feelings. Why?
6. Before we close, was there anything that hit you from the reading?
7. This quarter we're talking about living on mission, specifically what it means to be personally involved in making disciples of Jesus. This little book has impacted so many Christians over decades (including me). We'll dig into it over the next 4 weeks. Then the last 2 weeks we'll focus on some practical things related to disciple-making and missional life. **Read chapters 1 & 2 for next week (make notes, observations, questions).**

WEEK 2—Chapter 1 & 2—*Selection and Association*

1. **Read 2 Timothy 2:2**. Let's make as many observations about this text as we can.
   a. What do you see here? (look for obvious things and implications) **Multiplication** starts small. **Multiplication** is personal, not programmatic. **Something specific** is being passed on in multiplication. **Anyone** can multiply (just need faithfulness and ability to teach/pass on what you know).
   b. In what ways is this similar to Jesus' principle of selection?
   c. What motivates you about this personally?
   d. Draw the diagram and illustrate the power of multiplication.
2. What thoughts did you have on the selection chapter? Anything in particular grab your attention or challenge you?
3. Why did Jesus deliberately concentrate his life on so few people?
4. What would this look like lived out in our church (given our GC structure)?
5. How do you feel about the principle of selection (or concentrating on a few)? What objections might people have to this principle, and how would you respond to those objections?
6. What do you know about the disciples Jesus chose? How would you describe them?

7. A key quality of the disciples was that they were teachable. How do you recognize that in someone?
8. After 3 years, Jesus had a church of 120 people (p. 28)! This really didn't make much of a dent in the religious life of his day. Disciple-making starts small, sometimes with unnoticeable impact. *What would encourage you to keep going in the process (even when it is slow, small, and unnoticed)?*
9. **Application:** Take a minute and write down a starter list of younger believers or new believers that you know. Begin asking God to lead you to one or two people whom you could help grow in Christ next year.
10. What thoughts did you have from the association chapter?
11. **Read Mark 3:13-14**. Why were the 12 appointed? *To be with him and to be sent out to preach.* This is the big picture of discipleship.
    a. What do you think was involved in the disciples being WITH Jesus?
    b. How was Jesus both informal and intentional in his withness?
12. What could "withness" in discipleship look like in our day (specific ideas)? What challenges/barriers do you feel in living out this principle?
13. Why is being with people so essential to helping them mature in Christ? (i.e. why must discipleship be personal and not programmatic)?
14. We often hear from people in our church that they want to be mentored/discipled? Rarely do we hear people say they want to disciple others? *Why do you think that is? How would it change our church culture if more people were intentional with this?*

WEEK 3—Chapter 3 & 4—*Consecration* *(loving God by obeying him)* ***and Impartation*** *(loving others by giving our life away)*

1. **Read Luke 9:51-62**. (v. 51-56 give the context)
    a. General observations? What do you learn about what it means to follow Jesus from these verses?
    b. What issues do you think Jesus might be addressing with the first person in v. 57-58? What about the person in v. 59-60? What about the person in v. 61-62?
    c. Do you find yourself relating to one of the three in particular?
2. "Follow me" is a good two-word summary of the Christian life. What does that entail? (i.e. what sort of things fall under the umbrella of "follow me"?) What are some things you see hindering Christians in our culture from following Jesus wholeheartedly?
3. **What does consecration mean?** What were some of your takeaways from the chapter related to the idea of consecration?
4. Do we undersell the cost and the adventure of following Jesus? How so?
5. **Discuss in smaller groups:** Jesus came to make "the way of the cross to be the way of life" (p. 44). How have you seen the cross at play in your own discipleship? (i.e. what has had to die for you to follow Jesus?) How have you experienced deeper joy on the other side? How is losing your life a gain?

6. *"Obedience to Christ thus was the very means by which those in his company learned more truth"* (p. 48). How is obedience connected to learning? Can you think of specific ways you've experienced that in your own walk with Christ?
7. What commands of Christ do you think you might be *"dillydallying around with"*? (p. 50)
8. **What thoughts do you have from the impartation chapter?**
9. *"Love…is always giving itself away. When it is self-contained, it is not love"* (p. 54). Discuss. Do you agree? Why? Think about a time that you recently felt loved by someone. *(What did they give away to love you? What did it cost them?)*
10. **Read John 16:5-16.** How would you describe the Spirit's role in our sanctification? How would you describe the Spirit's role in mission?
11. Read and discuss the two paragraphs on the bottom of p. 60 (under "The Principal Issue Today"). If the Spirit of God always insists on making Christ known, what are the implications in my life?
12. Spend some time praying for one another in small groups (that we would obey Jesus and give away our lives for the sake of others).

WEEK 4—Chapter 5 & 6—*Demonstration and Delegation*

1. *"More is caught than is formally taught."* What's something you've learned about following Christ just from observing someone else? In what aspects of your walk with God do you find yourself imitating someone?
2. Initial thoughts you had from reading chapter 5 on demonstration?
3. **Read Philippians 3:17 and 4:9**. When it comes to teaching someone to follow Christ, "we are the exhibit" (p. 68). How do you react to that?
4. What would someone learn about following Christ just from observing your life (if all they had to go on was what you do and how you do it)? Think in terms of both strong points and deficits.
5. If a new Christian asked you to teach them to pray, what would you do? (Brainstorm) What if they asked you to teach them how to study the Bible…what would you do? (Brainstorm)
6. Jesus taught his disciples about evangelism by doing it in front of them. *"He led them to recognize the need inherent in all classes of people, and the best methods of approaching them"* (p. 66). How was his approach different with say Nicodemus and the woman at the well?
7. Jesus was so natural talking about the gospel as a way of life. When do you find it easiest to talk about the gospel with others? Most difficult? How many of you have ever gotten any kind of evangelism training?
8. **Initial thoughts you had from reading chapter 6 on delegation?**
9. As Jesus sent his disciples out, he told them to expect hardship (p. 74) and he told them that the gospel would bring division…because it's a fork in the road (p. 75). How have you experienced hardship or resistance for following Christ? Have you seen the gospel bring division?
10. *"The point Jesus made…was that the mission of his disciples was not different in*

principle or method from his own" (p. 76). What difference would it make in your life if you truly believed that your mission was the same as Jesus' mission?

11. What hinders you from taking the Great Commission personally?
12. **Jesus gave his disciples assignments. So, we're going to leave today with an assignment *(to be done sometime in the next 3 weeks…i.e. by the Wed after Thanksgiving)*:** Initiate with someone in your life who is not a Christian. This can take any form you like *(Have a spiritual conversation with them; Ask about their spiritual beliefs; Serve them in some way; Have coffee with them; Have them over for dinner; Ask them if there's anything you can pray for in their life).* Let's see what God does as we take the initiative to move towards others in the power of the Holy Spirit. We'll share some of what happened when we're together on December 4.
13. Spend some time praying that our little group would be a tangible expression of Christ's mission within our church.

WEEK 5—Chapter 7 & 8 and Epilogue—*Supervision, Reproduction, and The Master and Your Plan*

1. **Read John 15:1-17** (the word "fruit" is used 8 times in this passage).
    a. What observations do you make about fruit-bearing?
    b. What does Jesus mean by fruit?
    c. What applications do you make to our topic of disciple-making from this text?
    d. How do you feel about Jesus' expectation that his disciples bear fruit?
2. Look back over your notes/highlights from chapters 7 & 8 (supervision & reproduction)? Anything in particular grab your attention or challenge you?
3. *"Jesus rotated his teaching between instruction and assignment"* (p. 81). Why do you think this method is important to discipleship? Is there an imbalance in how we think about discipleship as a church? And what could we do to correct this imbalance?
4. Let's talk about the Epilogue. Anything stand out to you or challenge you from that chapter?
5. *"The best work is always done with a few. Better to give a year or so to one or two people who learn what it means to conquer for Christ than to spend a lifetime with a congregation just keeping the program going"* (p. 101). What do you think about this statement? What it would look like if Providence was a church that just "kept the program going"?
6. We've spent ¾ of this year talking about walking with God (spiritual disciplines, re-forming our loves, and gospel application), before we've ever talked about passing it on to others. *Why is our own walk with God so important in the disciple-making process? Why is firsthand knowledge of Jesus essential for laborers in the Great Commission?*
    a. *"You do not reproduce who you want to be. You reproduce who you are." (George Ross)*

7. *"[In order to know the gospel] people need a mentor who will stand among them and say, 'Follow me, I know the way'"* (p. 100). How do you feel about being the kind of person who can say that?
8. Reminder about assignment to initiate with someone in your life who is not a Christian *(can take any form you like; let's see what God might do)*.
9. End by spending time praying for laborers (Matthew 9:37-38). See p. 94.

WEEK 6—Evangelism Training

1. Let's share a little about the assignment from last time, which was to initiate in some way with a non-Christian in your life (It was pretty wide open: Could have been a spiritual conversation; serving them in some way; asking to pray for them). *What did you do? What happened? How did you see God at work (in you, in the other person)?*

2. In John 17:20, Jesus says that others will believe in him through our words about him (p. 91 in *Master Plan*). This was Jesus' plan to reach the lost (that his disciples would share Christ with others, who would share Christ with others, and so on)
    a. *How confident do you feel in sharing the gospel with others?*
    b. *Where do you feel deficient or lack confidence?*
    c. *How many of you have ever gotten any kind of evangelism training?*
3. There will be times when you need to state the gospel clearly and simply to help someone understand what it means to trust Christ (i.e. how they can become a Christian). Even though the gospel is a big sweeping story (related to the Kingdom of God and the redemption of the whole creation), it is also personal. It is helpful to be able to boil it down and simplify it, so that someone can respond personally to it. We don't want to be fuzzy or unclear at this point.
    a. <u>*Let's brainstorm together (whiteboard)*</u>*: What are some of the things you need to talk about when sharing the gospel? Or asked another way, what does someone need to know in order to become a Christian (what are the essentials)? Think in broad categories (i.e "God").*
    b. *What do we need to share about God? In other words, we can't say everything about God, but what is essential in a brief gospel conversation? Can you think of any relevant Bible verses?*
    c. *What do we need to share about humanity and sin? Bible verses?*
    d. *What do we need to share about Jesus? Bible verses?*
    e. *What do we need to share about faith? Bible verses?*
4. Can you say the gospel in 1 to 4 sentences? Someone take a stab at it.
5. I want to show you a way to talk about the gospel with one verse. Certainly, you could never boil down the whole Bible into one verse. But Romans 6:23 is a pretty concise overview of the gospel. If you can talk about the concepts raised in this verse, you can expand the conversation from there. I like to draw things out on a napkin or piece of scrap paper.

6. Do the presentation. *(Start with, "Can I show you a verse that will give you the basic message of the Bible?")*
7. Hand out final project on multiplication.

WEEK 7—Evaluation and Wrap-up

1. Breakfast tacos

2. Fill out evaluations (15 min)

3. Express our thankfulness for the group. It's been a joy to be around you so consistently for a year, growing in our friendship with you, growing in our knowledge and love of God together with you. We look forward to serving alongside you in our church. Our prayer is that you would walk with God and make disciples of Jesus. That you would love God and love people.

    a. I want to encourage you to see yourself as a spiritual leader in our church, to take personal ownership of God's mission through the church, and to proactively use your gifts to minister to others.
    b. I want to encourage you to make disciples **(Read 2 Timothy 2:2 and 2 Timothy 4:1-5 and comment)**. *You are disciple of Jesus. Make disciples of Jesus. It will be your great joy!*

4. Before we get in smaller groups and share what we're planning to do for our multiplication project, anyone have any final words of encouragement for the group? Any takeaways or thoughts to leave with us all?

5. Reminder to fill out Post-Equip Self-Assessment to help with my research. Alex will send you a link and your randomly assigned number. Please fill it out without looking back at your answers from the Pre-Equip Self-Assessment.

6. Get in groups of 4 and share what you are planning to do for your multiplication project. End by praying for one another in this endeavor.

APPENDIX C: PROJECTS

Quarter 1: Spiritual Disciplines Project

Spiritual Disciplines Project

Overview: Using Bible intake and one other spiritual discipline of your choosing from Whitney's book, form a personal spiritual disciplines plan to follow for the rest of the year. The goal is to grow in godliness and commune with God by thoughtfully putting into practice some of what we have been reading. We want to be people who have *"deep, time-worn channels of communing discipline between ourselves and God."*

Guidelines:

- For both disciplines, articulate a **doable/realistic** plan. Give specifics of what you intend to do with this particular spiritual practice. *What? When? Where? How?*
- For both disciplines, answer this question: How do I envision this helping me grow in godliness (which is both closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ)?
- Accountability related to your plan: Coordinate with two or three other members of Equip to meet a couple of times during the Equip breaks for prayer and accountability. Also commit to regularly pray for and ask one another about your spiritual disciplines plans.
- Remember the gospel and rest in it! Your righteousness is in Christ alone, not in keeping a spiritual disciplines plan.

1. **First discipline—Bible Intake**
   - My plan
   - How will this grow me in godliness?
   - What is my accountability plan?
2. **Second discipline—**
   - My plan
   - How will this grow me in godliness?
   - What is my accountability plan?

Quarter 2: Spiritual Formation Project

Spiritual Formation Project

PERSONAL LITURGIES INVENTORY

Introduction

When it comes to spiritual formation, we are formed by our loves, by our desires, by what we want. Therefore, one way to think about discipleship to Jesus is loving what Jesus loves.

First Step: Take a few minutes to read Romans 6 (printed on p. 2). Romans 6 first teaches about our union with Christ, and then it tells us how discipleship to Jesus works. It says that if we present ourselves to righteousness over and over again, then over time we become obedient slaves to righteousness. Or to use the language of *You Are What You Love*: We practice Christ-like habits over and over again, and those habits form our loves. We become the kind of people who love what Jesus loves. Then, without thinking about it, we act like him. According to verse 23, the end of those things is eternal life in Jesus. That's where discipleship to Jesus is headed. That's the vision of the good life. You are what you love, and your loves are formed by your habits, which are shaped by your liturgies (regular practices/rituals). How do we grow to love what Jesus loves? Through our habits.

This is good news because it means that God has given us clear ways of growing in our faith. But it's also a little scary because it means that we might not love what we think. If our loves are formed by our habits, then we might be learning to love something that we're not even aware of. Many of our habits are second nature and so we are doing them without even thinking or noticing that we are doing them. Our habits can govern our lives in unconscious ways. You might not love what you think, so it's helpful to take stock: What are my habits and how are they forming me? What do they reveal about what I really love?

Assessing Our Personal Habits

Take some personal reflection time to take stock of your own personal habits and loves. Ideally you would take a couple of hours on this (i.e. a morning or an evening). First ask God to give you eyes to see yourself accurately and to give you sensitivity to his Spirit as he leads you. Then begin working slowly through the assessment tool. Go through this with the assumption that you might not love what you think you love. Meaning, don't just assume you know the answers and simply pick out some easy things to work on. Rather, think deeply about the categories and questions and see what it reveals. This is the kind of tool that would be even more effective with some feedback from your friends and/or spouse.

ROMANS 6

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We

were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Taking Stock of Your Habits

ASSESSMENT TOOL **EQUIP**

1. **What are your daily and weekly routines or habits?** These are likely things you do without even thinking about them. Think through your typical day and week and how you spend your time. Some helpful categories to consider: *Morning rituals, evening rituals, habits in conversation, habits with technology, habits when you enter a meeting or a room full of people, how you plan out your week, ways you spend your money, exercise and sleep routines, how you spend your free time, your weekends, your lunches, etc.* (Examples: "I check my phone whenever I have a spare minute. I spend time reading every day. I leave a gathering as soon as its officially over. I pray in the mornings. I answer emails as they come in. I meet someone from my GC once a week for coffee. I usually eat lunch while I work. Etc.")

2. **What are your monthly and annual routines?** There will be less of these, but they form you nonetheless.

3. **Select some of your most prominent daily/weekly routines and habits.** What vision of the good life is carried in those liturgies? Is there a "gospel story" embedded in those practices? *(Other questions to consider: What kind of person do these practices want you to become? What do they want you to love? What do they implicitly teach you about yourself, other people, or the world? To what kingdom are they aimed?)*

4. **How do people experience you?** What adjectives would they use to describe you (i.e. fun-loving, determined, direct, distracted, etc.)? Do you see any correlation between your habits/liturgies and how people experience you?

5. **What are some desires you have for your life (in terms of your personal growth, your work, your life with family and friends)?** *(Ex: "I want to have regular meals with my spouse or family. I want to have meaningful conversation with friends. I want to read through the Bible each year. I want to disciple others to follow Jesus. I want to do excellent work with integrity. I want to pray for my neighbors. I want to read a book a month.")* How are your habits lining up with your desires? How are they not?

6. **What are your main takeaways about your habits/routines? Here are some suggested questions to help you answer this:**
   - What is God saying to you about your habits and routines (your personal liturgies)?

- What telos or vision of the good life is embedded in your most prominent daily routine/ritual?
- Is there anything conspicuously absent from your life that you wish was present in your life?
- Were there any trends you noticed about yourself? Are there any descriptive words or phrases that kept coming to your mind when you evaluated how you spend your time?
- Were there any surprises in what you discovered?
- What were you encouraged about?
- What is one thing you'd like to change this year and what habits would it require to form you into that type of person?

***Plan on taking 5 minutes to share your takeaways from the project with the rest of the group.**

Multiplication Project

PERSONAL DISCIPLE MAKING

We spent three quarters of this year talking about walking with God (spiritual disciplines, re-forming our loves, and gospel application) before we've ever talked about passing it on to others. Why is our own walk with God so important in the disciple-making process? Why is firsthand knowledge of Jesus essential for laborers in the Great Commission? Because: *"You do not reproduce who you want to be. You reproduce who you are." (George Ross)*

With that in mind, the goal of this final project is to pass on something that you've experienced firsthand in knowing and following Jesus. Choose **one** of the following options:

First Option:

1. Select one or two people who are Christians and invite them to explore with you what it means to walk more closely with Jesus.
2. Criteria to ask yourself: Are these people faithful (reliable), available (willing to make time), and teachable (want to learn)?
3. Commit to meet regularly for 3-6 months (weekly or every other week). During that time, go through either *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* or *You Can Change*. Read and discuss the book, but also do the application project.
4. The content is important, but it is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a means of facilitating meaningful relationship, conversation, and growth. For example, your regular meeting might be centered on the reading, but it should also include spiritual inquiry, talking through real life situations, prayer, encouragement, and challenge when needed. Also, think of ways to invite them into your life and interact outside of your "official" meeting time.
5. Think through how you might incorporate the principles from *Master Plan* into these relationships: *Selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision, and reproduction.*

Second Option:

1. Select one or two people who are not yet Christians (or are very young Christians) and invite them to explore the question "who is Jesus?" by reading and discussing the book of John together.
2. Criteria to ask yourself: Are these people willing to seek truth and explore the Bible honestly? Are they available (willing to make time)?
3. Commit to meet regularly for 3-6 months (weekly or every other week). During that time, read the book of John together and discuss it (i.e. one chapter each meeting). Some good questions to ask of the text in each chapter: *Who does Jesus say that he is? Who do others say that he is? What issue that is relevant to my life is Jesus addressing? How does he address it? What do I believe about him?*

4. Think of ways to invite them into your life and interact outside of your "official" meeting time.

Accountability and Assistance

- Who will hold you accountable to do this?
- Todd and Amy are available to assist in any way with resources, counsel, prayer, or suggestions. We'll also check in with you to see how it's going.

APPENDIX D: SELF-ASSESSMENTS

Pre-Equip and Post-Equip Self-Assessment for 2018 and 2019 Classes

*Enter your randomly assigned # _____

*Please give your honest answers to these questions without looking up answers in the Bible or using any other helps.

1. How would you rate your familiarity with all of the different spiritual disciplines that God has given us to help us grow in Christ?

1	2	3	4	5
Unfamiliar				Very familiar

2. How often do you personally spend time with God through one or more of the spiritual disciplines?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	2-3 days a week	4-5 days a week	Almost every day

3. Give your response to the following statement: I feel “at home” in the Bible and I can immediately point to specific and current things God is teaching me there.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

4. What would you say are a few of the most important factors in growing a person’s love for Jesus and his kingdom?

5. If someone asked you why regularly worshipping with the church on Sundays is important to their spiritual growth, what would you tell them?

6. How would you summarize the gospel in one sentence?

7. How confident do you feel sharing the gospel with someone who is not yet a Christian?

1	2	3	4	5
Not confident at all				Very confident

8. How often do you have spiritual conversations with others (both Christians and non-Christians)?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

9. You are talking with a friend in the church who is struggling with sinful anger in their personal relationships. In a few sentences, how would you help them apply the gospel to this particular area of sin? In other words, how would you give them good news and not just good advice?

10. How would you assess your self-awareness of particular heart idols in your life and how they commonly manifest?

1	2	3	4	5
Unaware (I likely have significant blind spots)	Somewhat unaware	I'm not sure	Somewhat aware	Keenly aware (I can articulate these things)

11. The gospel not only provides the means for forgiveness, but also the means for real change in our actual lives. In a few sentences, how does the gospel work in our lives to change us?

12. How confident do you feel in your ability to lead others spiritually (in either small-group or one-on-one contexts)?

1	2	3	4	5
Not confident				Very confident

13. What factors most affect your confidence or lack of confidence in leading others spiritually?

14. How comfortable would you feel telling a younger Christian, "Follow me as I follow Christ?"

1	2	3	4	5
Very uncomfortable				Very comfortable

15. In your own words, what is the Great Commission and how do you see your role in it?

Self-Assessment from First Year Equip (2017 Class)

*Enter your randomly assigned # _____

*Please give your honest answers to these questions without looking up answers in the Bible or using any other helps.

1. Nine months later, I still find the content from Equip shaping my thinking (i.e. how I think about my walk with God, the gospel, my ministry to others, or my role in the church).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

2. Nine months later, I find that Equip has made a practical difference in my life (i.e. a difference in my practices, habits, conversations, ministry to others, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

3. I am more consistent in practicing the spiritual disciplines since going through Equip.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

4. How often do you personally spend time with God through one or more of the spiritual disciplines?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	2-3 days a week	4-5 days a week	Almost every day

5. I now find myself more consciously paying attention to how my habits and routines are shaping my loves.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

6. I now feel more confident to lead others spiritually than I did before going through Equip.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

7. I now feel more confident in talking about the gospel than I did before going through Equip.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

8. I feel called to make disciples and I feel equipped to do so.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

9. I feel more ownership of Providence Church than I did before going through Equip.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

10. I am currently leading others spiritually or discipling someone.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

11. What (if anything) from Equip has stuck with you the most and why?

12. How has that changed your practices (if at all)?

13. Have you passed on anything you learned from Equip to others? If so, what have you passed on and in what context?

14. How would you summarize the gospel in one sentence?

15. You are talking with a friend in the church who is struggling with sinful anger. In a few sentences, how would you help them apply the gospel to this particular area of sin?

16. In your own words, what is the Great Commission and how do you see your role in it?

17. Where do you feel the need for more equipping as it relates to making disciples or leading spiritually (i.e. what are your “gaps”)?

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